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POETIC AND VERSE CRITICISM

OF

THE REIGN OF ELIZABETH.

BY

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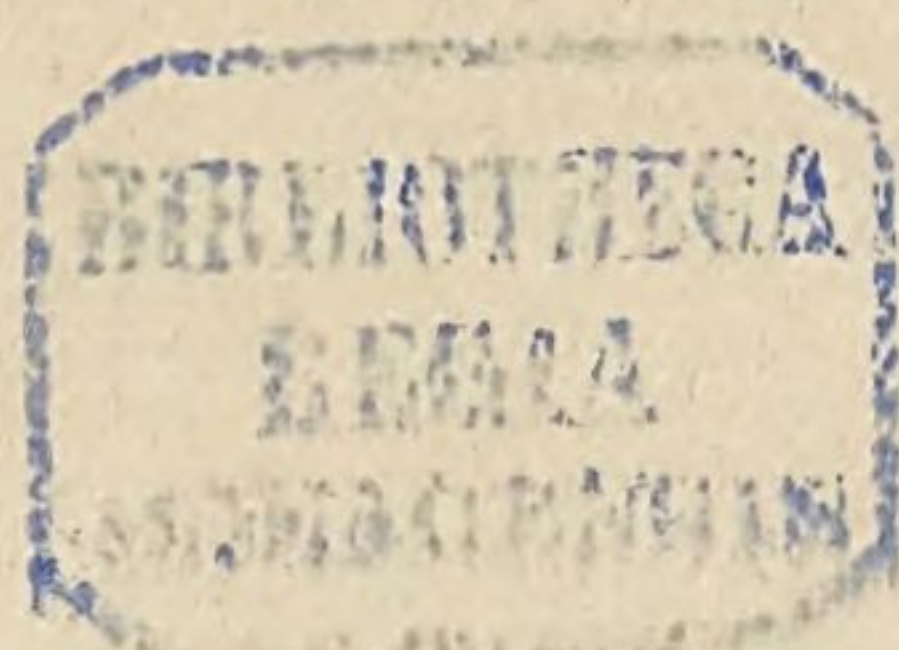
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## POETIC AND VERSE CRITICISM

OF THE

REIGN OF ELIZABETH.

### I.

As must ever be the case, the practice of English poetry long preceded any attempt to formulate the rules and principles upon which that practice was based; and it was not until long after the quickening impulse that rendered modern English verse possible had made itself felt in Sir Thomas Wyatt and his disciple, the Earl of Surrey, that anything like such an attempt at the formulation of critical rules was made. It is the purpose of this paper to treat of the poetical and verse criticism of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, in which will be included not only a consideration of those rules and precepts, which were in common acceptance during the period, and the more purely art criticism of such men as Sidney, but likewise some of the vagaries of that class of poetical innovators, such as Harvey and Standyhurst, each of whom was so diligently engaged in the assuredly praiseworthy attempt of beating out new and untried paths by which English poetry might attain renown. Except that it also includes the consideration of Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apology for Poetrie*, and the various pamphlets of Gosson and others which led to that admirable work, our topic is mainly with that group of writings which, beginning with the critical utterances of Roger Ascham and George Gascoigne's attempt to formulate some of the rules of English versification, expended itself largely in the happily fruitless endeavor to impress upon English poetry the classical versification of the ancients; but left behind it a residuum of unusually rich results to the yet



unformed art of English poetry.<sup>1</sup> The consideration of mediæval verse-principles and verse-theories belongs not here, whether they be based on Aristotle's *Poetica*, or upon spontaneous and later national growths; nor need we be concerned with contemporary estimates of poets such as are contained in Bolton's *Hypocritica* and elsewhere, or with a discussion of Elizabethan verse-forms, except in so far as their mention concerns the elucidation of Elizabethan theories of verse. Again, notwithstanding Dr. Schipper's excellent and exhaustive treatise on the subject of English versification, which seems to leave little to be desired in the extensive field that it covers, in view of the many existing questions still open to further investigation, we shall seek to set up no absolute standards by which to judge these lucubrations of another age, preferring rather to present them without comment, or, at least, with as little, as is consistent with a plain exposition of them. Finally, we shall not pursue the subject beyond the year 1603, deeming that date a sufficiently late one to include all the essential results of the earlier formative periods, as well as the results of that matchless score of years, from 1580 to 1600, in which the efflorescence of English poetry is generally regarded as having reached its height.

Mr. Saintsbury has vividly represented to us the state into which English poetry had fallen previous to its revival at the hands of Wyatt and Surrey.<sup>2</sup> Two schools existed; the expiring Chaucerian school, which, in the hands of increasingly feeble imitators of the *Roman de la Rose* and the early *Rhétoriciens*, was dragging its weary, superannuated limbs to its legitimate end, the grave; and the vigorous, old, English school of "prosaic doggerel," still hobbling its lame dog-trot, but deaf and blind to those finer qualities of the soul of poetry, which alone are capable of preserving a national literature beyond the limits of con-

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Schipper has well defined this group of writers as those "die unter dem Einfluss der Renaissance in England entstanden, und die für uns von grösserem Interesse sind, als die fruchtlosen Versuche, die antiken Metra, zumal den Hexameter, in der englischen Sprache nachzubilden, nämlich der Gruppe der um diese Zeit in rascher Folge veröffentlichten, ziemlich zahlreichen, theoretischen Untersuchungen über englische Metrik und Poetik." *Englische Metrik, Zweiter Theil: Neuenglische Metrik*, p. 9. See also *ibid.*, p. 455 (§ 254) and elsewhere.

<sup>2</sup> *A History of Elizabethan Literature*, Chap. I, *passim*.



temporary interest. Notwithstanding Sackville's qualified success in infusing a sort of dying spurt into the flagging Chaucerian school in his *Induction* and other contributions to the *Mirror for Magistrates*, and notwithstanding the unquestioned vigor of such men as Skelton, it was plain to be seen that no advance was to be made by English poetry along the lines of either of these moribund schools. It was imperative that a new path be made; and Sir Thomas Wyatt, though perhaps unconsciously, was the first to discover the direction it ought to take. Although the statement is somewhat bold, Mr. Saintsbury is perfectly right in saying that Wyatt could have had "no theory of any English prosody before him," and in adding: "So stumbling and knock-kneed is his verse that anyone who remembers the admirable versification of Chaucer may now and then be inclined to think that Wyatt had much better have left his innovations alone."<sup>1</sup> But in the first breaking of the ground we must not look for the finished highway. Wyatt gave abundant promise of the broad daylight of poetry that was to follow hard upon these crepuscular rays. That we may see what was the work of this coryphæus of modern verse, let us take his sonnet in translation of Petrarch's "*Amor che nel pensier mio vive e regna.*"<sup>2</sup>

The longe loue, that in my thought I harber,  
 And in my heart doth kepe his residence,  
 Into my face preaseth with bold pretence,  
 And there campeth, displaying his banner.  
 She that me learns to loue, and to suffer,  
 And willes that my trust, and lustes negligence  
 Be reined by reason, shame and reuerence,  
 With this hardinesse takes displeasure.  
 Wherwith loue to the hartes forest he fleeth,  
 Leauyng his enterprise with paine and crye,  
 And there him hideth and not appeareth.  
 What may I do? when my maister feareth,  
 But in the field with him to liue and dye,  
 For good is the life, endyng faithfully.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Sonetto XCL—109, *Le Rime di Francesco Petrarca con prefazione di Adolfo Bartoli*, in Firenze, Sansoni editore, 1883.

<sup>3</sup> *Tottel's Miscellany*, Ed. Arber, p. 33. Wyatt, Aldine Poets, p. 1.



In this sonnet, which exhibits, according to Dr. Nott, "all the peculiarities of the poet's first style,"<sup>1</sup> we may note the following licenses and metrical faults, to be captious: 1. Conflict between word and verse accent, in the wrenched accents *preaséth*, *campéth*, *appearéth*, *fearéth*,<sup>2</sup> *harbér*, *bannér*, *suffér* and *maistér*; <sup>3</sup> a similar, although less reprehensible, conflict in the words *hárdiness*, *appeàreth*, and *léauyng*, explainable as hovering accents (*Schwebende Betonung*).<sup>4</sup> 2. Violence to the rhetorical or syntactical accent in the lines:

The longe loue, *thát* in *mý* thought *I* harber,  
And willes that *my* trust *ánd* lustes negligence,  
What may I do? when *mý* maister feareth.<sup>5</sup>  
For good is *thé* life, endyng faithfully.

3. A line lacking a syllable:

With his hardinesse takes *displeasure*.<sup>6</sup>

unless we read *displeasure* a tetrasyllable; 4. A line of eleven syllables:

Wherwíth loue tó the hártes forést he fléeth,<sup>7</sup>

unless *fleeth* be a monosyllable, in which case the rime is destroyed. 5. The riming of *appeàreth* and *fearéth* with the accent not on the penult but on the already wrenched syllable, *eth*; the riming of either *fleeth*, monosyllabic, with *fearéth* or

<sup>1</sup> *Works of Surrey and Wyatt*, by Dr. Nott, Lond., 1815, ii, p. 537, note.

<sup>2</sup> See Schipper, *Neuengl. Metr.* in general, § 54 and § 61, where these cases are referred to Hovering accent, e. g., "Wherewith love tó the héart's forést he flèeth; And thére him hideth ánd nót appeàreth," p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> See *Ibid.*, § 60 and 55, p. 129. Ellis in his Pronouncing Vocabulary of the XVI Century, (*Engl. Pron.*, iii, p. 887, E. E. Text Soc.), gives *hárbour*, *súffer* and *máster*, (*banner* is not in the vocabulary), all on the authority of Gill. This class of words were mostly in a state of transition in Wyatt's time. See Abbott's *Shakespeare Grammar*, Introd., p. 11, and Schipper, § 56, under *-er* and *-our*.

<sup>4</sup> *Into* (line 3), is not mentioned here, as it was probably pronounced *intó*. Cf. Abbott, *Sh. Gram.*, § 457 a.

<sup>5</sup> A strong cæsura after *do*, and the reading of the last three feet as troches, can alone save this line, e. g., "Whén my maister feáreth."

<sup>6</sup> E. g. (˘) *With his hárdinésse takes displeásure*, which is improbable, *With his hardinésse tákes displéasure* (˘), or, possibly, *displè-a-súre*. See Abbott's *Sh. Gram.*, § 479, and Ellis' Vocabulary, as above, p. 887.

<sup>7</sup> See Schipper's scansion of the verse, above, note.



of *fleéth* with *fearéth*<sup>1</sup>; the riming of the final syllables of *dis-pleasure*, *suffér* and *harbér*.<sup>2</sup>

Of course no one can be unaware that it is straining a point thus to judge Wyatt's earlier work by the absolute standard of the metrical verse. As Dr. Nott said long since, "the lines must be read rythmically with a regular cæsura in the middle; and a strong accent is to be thrown on the last syllable, without which the rhyme itself cannot in many instances be preserved."<sup>3</sup> "By the term 'rythmical,' Nott means a verse cast not in the regular iambic decasyllabic form, but one read with a strongly marked cæsura in the middle of the line, containing more, or fewer, syllables than the verses which precede and follow, but agreeing with them in the number of principal accents, generally four, and depending on the use of the pause and the swing of the verse for its conformity to the general rhythm. It might happen, and indeed does, that the line is decasyllabic without necessarily becoming iambic also; and here it is necessary to read the verse, not with the accent bestowed as in an iambic line, but in the older style, with the cæsura strongly marked, and the stress placed on those syllables where it would most naturally fall."<sup>4</sup> Wyatt's earlier verse was a transition verse, affected by the older native influences as well as the newer foreign ones.<sup>5</sup> It was not the want of a prosody that was troubling him, but the confusion of two distinct systems, the rythmical and the metrical, in which the latter finally prevailed. Again, the language was at the time undergoing a change in the accentuation of many words of foreign origin, and in the picturesque phrase of Dr. Abbott: "While the contest was pending, and prisoners being taken and retaken on either side, we must not be surprised at

<sup>1</sup> See *ibid.*, in general § 27, and Guest, *Hist. of Engl. Rythms*, Ed. Skeat, 1882, p. 141.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 142.

<sup>3</sup> *Works of Surrey and Wyatt*, by Dr. Nott, ii, p. 537; note.

<sup>4</sup> Simonds' *Sir Thomas Wyatt and his Poems*. Bost., 1889, p. 66.

<sup>5</sup> "Our heroic verse," says Prof. F. B. Gummere, "is simply the result of forcing the iambic movement (influence of foreign models played its part here) upon some late forms of our old four stress verse." *The Translation of Beowulf and the Relation of Ancient and Modern English Verse*, *Amer. Jour. of Philol.*, vii, p. 62. Alscher also marks this tendency of Wyatt's to confuse four stress with heroic verse. *Wiener Beiträge*, etc., i (1886), pp. 72-75, and 77, where he examines the sonnet quoted above.



finding the same word ranged now under native, now under foreign colors."<sup>1</sup>

And yet, when all has been said, it must be confessed this is a very faulty showing in the metrical ability of a poet of rank in any age; though nothing like the same degree of faultiness can be proved of the bulk of Wyatt's work. Doubtless every one of these blemishes may be proved to exist somewhere in nearly any Elizabethan poet, Shakespeare himself not excepted; that they can be shown to exist to the same degree in the works of any Elizabethan poet who approaches Sir Thomas Wyatt in rank can be successfully denied. There is a difference between the journeyman's and the master's violation of rules; the first is due to ignorance or awkwardness, the second to masterful superiority. Let us see how the Earl of Surrey, Wyatt's disciple, translated the same sonnet only a few years later:

Loue that liueth, and reigneth in my thought,  
That built his seat within my captiue brest  
Clad in the armes, wherin with me he fought  
Oft in my face he doth his banner rest.  
She, that me taught to loue, and suffer payne,  
My doutfull hope, and eke my hote desyre,  
With shamefast cloke to shadowe and refraine,  
Her smilyng grace conuerteth straight to yre.  
And cowarde Loue then to the hart apace  
Taketh his flight, whereas he lurkes, and plaines  
His purpose lost, and dare not shewe his face.  
For my lordes gilt thus faultlesse byde I paynes.  
Yet from my lorde shall not my foote remoue,  
Swete is his death, that takes his end by loue.<sup>2</sup>

Note that the most irregular line, the first, in which the accent of the first two feet is inverted, has none the less a pleasing effect, because of the regard paid to the rhetorical stress in the other three feet. Further, we have here no wrenched accents (*bánn*er, not *bannér*; *súffer*, not *suffér*), no vicious attempts at false rime. In short, those qualities of poetical style for which Dr. Nott long ago so praised Surrey—dis-

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. Gram.* Introduc., p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> *Tottel's Miscellany*, Ed. Arber, p. 8; *Surrey*, Aldine Poets, p. 12.



continuance "of the French [*sic*] mode of laying an unnatural stress upon final syllables," observance of "the obvious and common pronunciation of our language," careful avoidance of double terminations, the use of "noble and harmonious words" for rime—all are to be found here.<sup>1</sup> "Surrey is a far superior metrist. Neither in his sonnets, nor in his various stanzas composed of heroics, nor in what may be called his doggerel metres . . . . do we find evidence of the want of ear or the want of resource in language which makes Wyatt's versification frequently disgusting."<sup>2</sup> When all has been said, the age that admitted the "lolloping amble" of the "Poulter's Measure" as its most usual metre,<sup>3</sup> and the age that loved the monotonous Alexandrine—notwithstanding what Chapman and Drayton latterly made of it—was, at the least, an age only in process of growth as to the conception of poetic form, with much before it, as yet, to learn.<sup>4</sup>

Such being the state of English poetry, we shall not be surprised to find, almost simultaneous with the awakening interest in the classics, and contemporary with the subsequent mania for translation, an increasing interest in what was likely to be the probable future of English poetry. Shrewd and learned old Roger Ascham devotes several pages of the second part of his *Scholemaster* to a criticism of English verse, and raises, among the first in England, that long-mooted question, classic metres *versus* English rimes. That we may have before us, at how early a period, the main bearings of the topic were matter of discussion, take the following from Ascham:

In deed, our English tong, hauing in use chiefly, wordes of one syllable which commonly be long, doth not well receiue the nature of *Carmen Heroicum*, bicause *dactylus*, the aptest foote for that verse, conteining one long and two short, is seldom therefore found in English: and doth also rather stumble than stand upon *Monasyllabis*. . . . And although *Carmen Exametrum* dothe rather trotte and hoble than runne smoothly in our English

<sup>1</sup> *Works of Surrey and Wyatt*, by Dr. Nott, i, p. cxciv.

<sup>2</sup> Saintsbury, *A History of Elizabethan Literature*, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Gascoigne, Ed. Arber, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> For a contemporary estimate of the state of poetry in the earlier half of Elizabeth's reign, see Thomas Nashe's Preface, *To the Gentlemen Students*, Greene's *Menaphon*. Greene's Works, Ed. Grosart, vi, pp. 9-28.



2 | tong, yet I am sure, our English tong will receive *carmen Iambicum* as naturallie, as either *Greke* or *Latin*. But for ignorance, men can not like, and for idlenes, men will not labor, to cum to any perfittes at all. . . . If men in England now, had the like reuerend regard to learning skill and judgement, and durst not presume to write, except they came with the like learnyng, and also did use like diligence, in searching out, not onelie just measure in euerie meter, as euerie ignorant person may easily do, but also trew quantitie in euerie foote and sillable, as onelie the learned shalbe able to do, and as the *Grekes* and *Romanes* were wont to do, surelie than rash ignorant heads, which now can easily reckon up fourteen sillables, and easilie stumble on euerie Ryme, either durst not, for lacke of such learnyng: or els would not in avoiding such labor be so busie as euerie where they be: and shoppes in London should not be so full of lewd and rude rymes, as commonlie they are.<sup>1</sup>

Such men as these last he considers, very properly, not true followers of Chaucer and Petrarch. Ascham continues:

This mislyking of Ryming, beginneth not now of any newfangle singularitie, but hath bene long misliked of many, and that of men, of greatest learnyng, and deepest judgement. And soch, that defend it, do so, either for lacke of knowledge what is best, or els of verie enuie, that any should performe that in learnyng, whereunto they . . . ., either for ignorance, can not, or for idlenes will not, labor to attaine unto.<sup>2</sup>

He then shows that rime was not unknown to the ancients, but was cast aside by them as unworthy "until ye Hunnes and Gothians and other barbarous nations, of ignorance and rude singularitie, did reuiue the same folie agayne." After praising the Earl of Surrey for his translation of Virgil, and Periz for a translation of Homer into Spanish, Ascham adds:

Yet neither of them hath fullie hite perfite and trew versifying. In deed, they obserue just number, and euen feete; but here is the fault, that their feete: be feete without ioyntes, that is to say, not distinct by trew quantitie of sillabes: And so, soch feete, be but numme feete. . . . And as a foote of wood is a plaine shew of a manifest maime, euen so feete, in our English versifying, without quantitie and ioyntes, be sure signes, that the verse is either, borne deformed, unnaturall and lame, and so verie unseemlie to looke upon.<sup>3</sup>

Denying that those who "be able to understand no more, then ye finde in the Italian tong" have any right to judge those who are alike wiser and better equipped, Ascham concludes:

<sup>1</sup> *The Scholemaster*, Ed. Arber, pp. 145-6.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 147-8.



And therefore euen as *Virgill* and *Horace* deserue most worthie prayse, that they spying the vnperfitnes in *Ennius* and *Plautus*, by trew Imitation of *Homer* and *Euripides*, brought Poetrie to the same perfitnes in *Latin*, as it was in *Greke*, euen so those, that by the same way would benefite their tong and contrey, deserue rather thankes than disprayse in that behalfe.<sup>1</sup>

It is scarcely surprising that a man like Ascham should have taken this stand, when we consider that he was, before all, a scholar possessed of a far greater familiarity with the classics than with either his own or with other modern literatures. Moreover, Ascham, although unusually liberal for his age, was not without his prejudices, and one of the strongest was his prejudice against Italy, which extended, in some degree, to her authors. Ascham recognized, with perfect justice, that none of the existing English schools of poetry could compete with the formal excellence of classic models; he remembered the old tales about Virgil and Horace "spying the vnperfitnes of Ennius and Plautus;" and that the same thing could be done, and ought to be done, in English became perfectly clear to him. We may laugh as much as we please at this simplicity in the old tutor, but if we recall Macaulay's enumeration of the books that formed the library of the Princess Elizabeth or Lady Jane Gray,<sup>2</sup> with the conspicuous absence in it of the vast majority of our every-day English classics, it will readily be seen that we are demanding a prophetic vision on the part of Ascham which is simply unreasonable.

## II.

There is little doubt that to George Gascoigne belongs the credit, as Nashe states it, not only "of first beating the path to that perfection which our best Poets have aspired too since his departure,"<sup>3</sup> but also of laying down informally a set of rules for the regulation of English verse, as remarkable for their simplicity as for their reasonableness. In *Certayne Notes of Instruction concerning the making of verse or ryme in English*, written at

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> *Lord Bacon*, Macaulay's Essays, vol. iii, p. 350.

<sup>3</sup> *To the Gentlemen Students of both Universities*, Preface to Greene's *Menaphon*. Works of Greene, Ed. Grosart, vi, p. 20.



*the request of Master Edouardo Donati*,<sup>1</sup> we have, in all probability, the earliest set treatise on versification in the English language. This little tract was published first with Gascoigne's second augmented edition of his Poems, in 1575. It is unnoticed in the titular enumeration of contents, and, unlike the other contents, is bound in without pagination. This seems to point to its having been incorporated in the book as an after consideration, and perhaps printed separately at an earlier date. It may therefore have been written at almost any period of Gascoigne's literary career, although, probably, not earlier than March, 1572, the date of the first edition of his works.

Several reasons contributed to make Gascoigne a man peculiarly fitted for such a work. He was not a pedantic scholar in love with a past age, but a man of the world, with the tastes and practical appreciation of such a man; while, owing to his seniority, he escaped the taint of the absurd classical attempts of Gabriel Harvey and the Areopagus Club. Moreover, Gascoigne was a practical poet, who deduced the rules of his art from its practice, and did not seek to set up a theory, and then write in accord with it, as did some of the later critics. As might be expected of such a man, Gascoigne was a conscious purist, imbued with an unaffected love of his mother tongue, and eagerly contentious to reclaim it from the foreign words which were already beginning to make themselves felt as an important element in the language. His words on this topic are well worthy of quotation :

I haue alwayes bene of opinion, that it is not vnpossible eyther in Poemes or in Prose too write both compendiously and perfectly in our English tongue. And therefore although I chalenge not vnto my selfe the name of an English Poet, yet may the Reader finde oute in my writings, that I haue more faulted in keeping the olde English wordes (*quamuis iam obsoleta*) than in borrowing of other languages such Epithetes and Adiectiues as smell of the Inkhorne. . . . .

Although I be sometimes constreyned for the cadence of rimes, or *per*

<sup>1</sup> The *Certayne Notes* has been reprinted in Haselwood's *Ancient Critical Essays*, 1811-1815, ii, pp. 1-12; by Mr. Arber in his *English Reprints*, with other of Gascoigne's work; and by Mr. W. C. Hazlitt in his collected, but incomplete, edition of Gascoigne, *Roxburghe Library*, i, pp. 500-508.



*licentiam Poeticam*, to vse an ynkhorne terme or a straunge word: yet hope I that it shall be apparant I haue rather regarde to make our natie language commendable in it selfe, than gay with the feathers of straunge birds.<sup>1</sup>

The *Certayne Notes*<sup>2</sup> consists of but ten small *octavo* pages in Mr. Arber's Reprint, and, considering its brevity and its importance, a short epitome of its contents may well be given. We are told: 1.<sup>3</sup> "The first and most necessarie poynt" in the making of a poem is "to grounde it upon some some fine inuention," and that no "apt vocables, or epythetes" will suffice, if "the Inuention haue in it not also *aliquid salis*." Things "*trita et obvia*" are to be avoided, and stress is laid upon "discoverie in shadowes *per Allegoriam*," that the "uncomely customes of common writers" may be avoided. 2. In the author's own words:

Your Inuention being once deuised, take heede that neither pleasure of rime, nor varietie of deuise, do carrie you from it: for as to use obscure and darke phrases in a pleasant Sonet, is nothing delectable, so to intermingle merie iests in a serious matter is an *Indecorum*.<sup>4</sup>

3. Hold the "just measure wherewith you begin your verse."  
4. Use words in their natural emphasis. Under this section Gascoigne takes occasion to speak briefly of accents, and to add: "Note you that commonly nowe a dayes in english rimes. . . . we use none other order but a foote of two sillables, whereof the first is depressed or made short, and the second is elevate or made long: and that sound or scanning continueth throughout the verse."<sup>5</sup> He then calls attention to the fact that formerly other feet were used, quoting a couple of verses of anapestic movement, and adding: "Also our father Chaucer hath used the same libertie in feete and measure that the Latinists do use:" certainly a somewhat loose statement. After lamenting the sole use of the iambus in English, he returns to his point and affirms the necessity of essential regularity in the fall of the accent.

<sup>1</sup> *Epistle to the reuerend Diuines*, prefatory to Gascoigne's *Posies*, Ed. Hazlitt, i, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> The numbers here given refer to the paragraphs of Gascoigne's treatise, as printed in the first edition, 1575. See Arber and Hazlitt, as above.

<sup>4</sup> *Certayne Notes*, Ed. Arber, p. 32.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.



5. Thrust as few wordes of many sillables into your verse as may be : and hereunto I might alledge many reasons ; first the most auncient English wordes are of one sillable, so that the more monasyllables that you use, the truer Englishman you shall seeme, and the lesse you shall smell of the Inke-horne. Also wordes of many syllables do cloye a verse and make it unpleasant, whereas woordes of one syllable will more easily fall to be short or long as occasion requireth, or wilbe adapted to become circumflexe or of an indifferent sounde.<sup>1</sup>

6. Let not your rime run away with your invention ; “do rather searche the bottome of your braynes for apt wordes, than change good reason for rumbling rime.” 7. This point is concerned with an obvious suggestion to aid the rimester and need not delay us.

8. You may use the same Figures or Tropes in verse which are used in prose : . . . . but yet therin remember this olde adage, *Ne quid nimis*, as many wryters which do know the use of any other figure than that whiche is expressed in repeticion of sundrie wordes beginning all with one letter, the which (beyng modestly used), lendeth good grace to a verse : but they do hunt the letter to deathe.<sup>2</sup> . . . . 9. Eschew strange words or *obsoleta et inusitata*, unless the Theame do give iust occasion.<sup>3</sup> . . . . II. Frame all sentences in their mother phrase or propre *idioma*.

12. Of that “shrewde fellow, poetically licence :”

which covereth many faults in a verse, it maketh wordes longer, shorter, of no sillables, of fewer, newer, older, truer, falser, and to conclude it turkeneth all things at pleasure.<sup>4</sup>

13. In this paragraph Gascoigne discusses “certayne pauses or restes in a verse whiche may be called *Ceasures*.” These, he holds, especially in the Rythme Royall, “to be at the wryters discretion.” 14. Several kinds of verse then in practice are here mentioned : “Rythme royall,” which is described ; the Ballade, “and thereof are sundrie sorts,” none of them that of Villon ; the rondlette, “the whiche dothe alwayes end with one self same foot or repeticion,” and “may consist of such measure as best liketh the wryter.” The sonnet, too, is mentioned, of which he says : “I can best allowe to call those sonnets which are of four-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 36.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.



teene lynes, euery line contayning tenne syllables. The first twelve do ryme in stanes of foure lines by crosse meetre, and the last two ryming together do conclude the whole." *Dyzaynes* and *Syxaines*, also termed "*sonetter*," are mentioned and explained; *Verlays*, defined as "greene songes," and a reference made to his own poem, "The Voyage into Holland;"<sup>1</sup> finally, we are informed that "the commonest sort of verse which we use now adayes . . . . doth consist of Poulters measure, which giueth xij for one dozen and xiiij for another." 15. He begs his friend to "auoyde prolixitie and tediousnesse," and to complete his meaning at the end of each "staffe, or at the end of euery two lines where you write by cooples . . . . for I see many writers which draw their sentences in length and make an end at latter Lammas." At last, after adding that he had almost forgotten a "notable kinde of ryme, called ryding ryme, and that is such as our Mayster and Father Chaucer used in his Canterburie Tales and in divers other delectable and light enterprises," our worthy old critic concludes:

Then to return to my matter, as this riding rime serueth most aptly to wryte a merie tale, so Rythme royall is fittest for a graue discourse. Bal-lades are beste of matters of loue, and rondlettes moste apt for the beating or handlyng of an adage or common proverbe: Sonets serue as well in matters of loue as of discourse: Disaymes and Sixames for shorte Fantazies: Ver-layes for an effectual proposition, . . . . and the long verse of twelue and fourteene sillables, although it be now adayes used for all Theames, yet in my iudgement, it would serue best for Psalmes and Himpnes.<sup>2</sup>

This little treatise, although it contains much that is trite and commonplace to-day, when judged by the historical estimate, is far from contemptible. The extremely limited enumeration of verse forms calls for some remark; and, while largely due to the actual poverty of English poetry in this respect, is likewise partly explainable by Gascoigne's own limited range. Writing

<sup>1</sup> "But I must tell you by the way, that I neuer redde any verse which I saw by auctori-tie called Verlay, but one, and that was a long discourse in verses of tenne syllables, whereof the foure first did ryme acrossse, and the fifth did answer to the first and thirde, breaking off there, and so going on to another termination." *Ibid.*, p. 39. If, by Verlay, Gascoigne means Virelay, his definition is as inaccurate as his etymology. *The Voyage, etc.*, is in Hazlitt's ed. of Gascoigne, i, 384.

<sup>2</sup> *Certayne Notes*, Ed. Arber, p. 40.



his verses, speaking roughly between 1562 and 1577, in which year he died, it will be seen that very few of the great names of Elizabeth's age had as yet appeared. Sackville, Turberville, Googe, Churchyard and Whetstone, with the earlier translators, such as Kinwelmarsh, Neville and Golding—such were Gascoigne's contemporaries, in none of whom would he be likely to find anything to lead him from his hopeless convictions that "we use none other order but a foote of two sillables," and that "Poulters measure" was "the commonest sort of verse which we use now adayes." It is true, to say nothing of anything earlier, that had Gascoigne known Sir Thomas Wyatt more intimately, he might have materially enlarged his enumeration with certain so-called Odes, the Rondeau (which that poet practised not without success), and no small number of minor forms.<sup>1</sup> Beside this, either Wyatt or Surrey could have afforded the critic a better example of the Petrarchian sonnet than that which he took from his own works or the works of his contemporaries. Even the lesser poets of *Tottel's Miscellany*, some of whom, such as Grimald and Vaux, were Gascoigne's older contemporaries, might have materially increased his list of forms. Moreover, the omission of any mention of blank verse in the *Certayne Notes* calls for remark, when we recall Sackville's tragedy, Surrey's translations and Grimald's two poems in that measure in *Tottel*, with all of which Gascoigne must have been acquainted; the more especially when we remember that the poet must already have been busied with the composition of his *Steele Glas* at a time not long subsequent to the first appearance of the *Certayne Notes* in print.<sup>2</sup>

As we have seen, Gascoigne had almost forgotten "a notable kind of rime," called "riding rime," which he assigns to the telling of "merrie tales" and "light enterprises." In this the critic but voices the common contempt into which the metre of five accents with couplet rime had fallen, a contempt often expressed by the critics and epigrammatists of the time, and

<sup>1</sup> Wyatt's Poems, Ed. Aldine, pp. 29-23, *et passim.*; and see *Wyatt and His Poems*, by W. E. Simonds, p. 103.

<sup>2</sup> Gascoigne began the *Steele Glas* in April, 1575. See preface to his *Complaynt of Phylomene*, Ed. Hazlitt, ii, p. 219.



scarcely overcome until after the beginning of the seventeenth century. It is notable that Gascoigne's own practice is consistent with this opinion; and it would be difficult to find an instance in his poems in which he has used the riming couplet except as the component part of a more highly organized stanza.<sup>1</sup>

That Gascoigne, unlike Ascham, omitted all allusion to classical metres was probably due to his personal character, his professed purism, and the more practical nature of his purpose in writing the treatise. It is plain, from other sources, that Gascoigne wasted no time on Alcaics, Sapphics or Hexameters, but wrote, in all probability, happily unconscious of any of the graver doubts that troubled such scholars as Ascham and Harvey.

Again, Gascoigne certainly showed himself, in this treatise and in the bulk of his verse, peculiarly at variance with the high, astounding terms of Marlowe and the distinctively archaic and poetical diction of Spenser, both of them soon to burst forth, when he anticipates the Wordsworthian doctrine,<sup>2</sup> of the identity of the language of verse and prose in his *dicta*, "You may use the same figures or tropes in verse which are in prose," and "eschew straunge words or *obsoleta et inusitata*."<sup>3</sup> Some of our own contemporary poets are far from at one with Gascoigne upon these two points.

It is certainly extremely interesting to find Gascoigne recognizing one of the greatest and most prevailing principles of English versification in this intelligent remark upon the verse of Chaucer:

And who so euer do peruse and well consider his workes, he shall finde that although his lines are not alwayes of one self same number of Syllables, yet beyng redde by one that hath understanding, the longest verse and that which hath most Syllables in it, will fall (to the eare) correspondent unto that which hath fewest sillables in it: and likewise that which hath in it fewest sillables, shalbe found yet to consist of woordes that haue suche naturall

<sup>1</sup> See Hazlitt's *Complete Poems of George Gascoigne*, Roxburghe Library, 1868, *passim*.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to the second ed. of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Ed. Knight, iv, p. 283, and *On Poetic Diction* (1815), *ibid.*, p. 305.

<sup>3</sup> See above, Ed. Arber, p. 36.



sounde, as may seeme equall in length to a verse whiche hath many moe sillables of lighter accenttes.<sup>1</sup>

This was no more than affirming of Chaucer what Coleridge afterward called "a new principle" in his preface to *Christabel*,<sup>2</sup> a principle the intelligent application of which has restored to our great dramatists many a line of irregular beauty, which the mistaken zeal of those editors who measure all poetry by the thumb and fingers had garbled and confined in the straight-jacket of perfect uniformity. It is but fair to say of Gascoigne, before leaving him, that, except in some such minor matters as "hunting the letter" and that "shrewde fellow," poetic license, he has lived up to his canons of versification to a remarkable degree, and exhibits at all times a fluent, easy and idiomatic English style in both his prose and verse. That the latter not infrequently sinks to the level of a *Musa pedestris*, is perhaps not greatly to be marvelled, considering his expression of opinion cited above, and the undoubted fact that Gascoigne belonged to that most ancient and irreproachable school which holds all subjects of human interest convertible into the terms of poetry by the exercise of a sort of *coup de main*.

Omitting the letters exchanged between Gabriel Harvey and Edmund Spenser, which were published in 1580, and which we shall defer, to take up the subject of the attempted introduction of classic metres into English connectedly, the next writer upon this subject is King James VI of Scotland, afterward to become King of England, who published *Ane Schort Treatise conteining some Revlis and Cautelis to be obseruit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie*.<sup>3</sup> This forms the fifth article of a miscellany in verse and prose entitled: *The Essayes of a Prentise, in the diuine Art of Poesie, Imprinted at Edinburgh, by Thomas Vau-*

<sup>1</sup> *Certayne Notes*, Ed. Arber, p. 34. Dr. Farmer long ago, in his *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare*, Malone's Shakespeare, i, p. 325, quoted this passage "for the benefit of the next editor of Chaucer."

<sup>2</sup> "The metre of *Christabel* is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so, from being founded on a new principle, namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables." Preface to the edition of 1816, Coleridge's works, Ed. Shedd, vii, p. 249.

<sup>3</sup> Otherwise entitled *A Treatise of the Airt of Scottis Poesie*, and reprinted in Hazell-wood's *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, pp. 96-117.



*troullier*, 1584, 4to,<sup>1</sup> and may, perhaps, be regarded as of comparatively little importance, except as an instance of the royal pedant's somewhat precocious learning.<sup>2</sup> We shall confine ourselves to an extremely short sketch of this production, which is "highly curious as well for its manner as for its matter."

To the inquiry, "quhairfore" he should have written on a subject in which "sa mony learnit men, baith of auld and of late hes already written," the royal author assigns two reasons: First, that his "reulis" are new and apply to Poesie "as being come to mannis age and perfectioun, quhair as then, it was bot in the infancie and chyldeheid," and second, like Voltaire's reason for writing the *Henriade*, "there hes neuer ane of thame written in our language. For albeit sindrie hes written of it in English . . . . zit we differ from thame in sindrie reulis of Poesie."<sup>3</sup> Haselwood remarks on this that "from the dates there can only be pointed out the essay by Gascoigne and the letters of Harvey and Spenser . . . . as part of the 'sindrie' productions. This passage wants some explanation, and perhaps its obscurity is not much relieved by the supposition that the royal author included the notices upon the poets scattered through the works of Ascham, Eliot, Wilson and others, as, in the imperfect state of criticism of that age, every desultory opinion of such men would be entertained with complacence by a scholar."<sup>4</sup> This question is not easily answered, although from the odd mixture of shrewd common sense and the pedant's love of theorizing that forms one of the prime qualities of the literary character of James, it seems more reasonable to consider the expression rather a case of pedantic hyperbole than to suppose the author really acquainted with any important treatise on the subject, even the mention of which has not been handed down to us. Drake surmises: "It is barely possible that the royal critic may have included in his 'sindrie' . . . . the pro-

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in R. P. Gillies' ed. of the *Works of King James VI*, and by Arber, *English Reprints*, 1869.

<sup>2</sup> James was little more than eighteen years of age at the publication of this work.

<sup>3</sup> Preface to the Reader, *Ane Schort Treatise*, Haselwood, *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.



duction of our immortal Spenser, . . . entitled *The English Poet*, a work which we regret should have been suffered to perish in manuscript."<sup>1</sup>

Under the first of James' rules we are advised, "ze sall keip iust cullouris," which somewhat cabalistic utterance turns out to concern the avoidance of identical rimes, the advice "rime ay on the hinmest lang syllabe," and a curious objection to the use of "a lang word" at the end of a verse, because it "eatis vp the other syllabe."<sup>2</sup> The word *Arabia* is given in illustration of this point, and the meaning is apparently that the antepenult is so much more strongly accented than the last syllable, that the latter's accent becomes by contrast valueless for purposes of rime. The second "chapter" is concerned with what the author terms "flowing," by which he means rhythm, "the verie twichestanequhairof is Musique." The kinds of syllables are then discussed, and we are cautioned that, with certain exceptions, "the nomber of zour fete in euey lyne be euin and nocht odde."<sup>3</sup> The "sectionun," *i. e.*, cæsure, which must fall "in the middes of euey lyne,"<sup>4</sup> forms the next topic, and we are informed that a line must not contain less than four, or more than fourteen, feet. "Ze aucht likewise be war with oft composing zour haill lynis of monosyllabis onely." But in all these matters as "reulis . . . be ane help and staff to nature, . . . zour eare man be the onely iudge and discerner thairof."<sup>5</sup>

Chapter third follows Gascoigne in urging natural order and avoidance of the insertion of words "*metri causa*." Proper names are to be "eschewit," as "it is hard to mak many lang names, all placit together, to flow weill." Use words "according to the matter," . . . of love, or tragedies, "zour wordis man be drawin lang," . . . in "Flyting and Inuectiues zour wordis . . . be cuttit short."<sup>6</sup> . . . Let all zour verse be Literall," *i. e.*, "ryme vpon a letter, speciallie

<sup>1</sup> *Sh. and His Times*, i, p. 462. For an account of this lost work see below.

<sup>2</sup> *Ane Schort Treatise, Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, p. 105-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8.

<sup>4</sup> In this King James agrees with the majority of the critics of his day. See Dr. Guest's *History of English Rythms*, p. 184.

<sup>5</sup> *Ane Schort Treatise, Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, p. 107.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.



Tumbling verse for Flyting." After briefly touching Comparison, Epithets and Proverbs,<sup>1</sup> the author ingenuously warns us: "Be warre with composing ony thing in the same maner, as hes bene ower oft vsit of before. . . And siclyke that ze descryue not the morning, and rysing of the Sunne, in the Preface of zour verse: for thir thingis are sa oft and dyuerslie written vpon be Poëtis already that gif ze do the lyke, it will appeare, ze bot imitate, and that it commis not of zour awin *Inuention*, quhilk is ane of the chief properteis of ane Poete."<sup>2</sup>

In "Chapter" seven, James objects to translation, and, as becomes a royal writer and a Stuart, adds: "Ze man also bewar of wryting ony thing of materis of commoun weill, or vther sic graue sene subiectis (except Metaphorically . . . zit nochtwithstanding vsing it very seindil) because . . . they are to graue materis, for a Poet to mell in." The last "Chapter" is "tuiching the kyndis of versis, mentionat," and exhibits but a limited acquaintance with forms already commonly in use, especially (as might be expected) in England, with the usual dogmatic assignment of each to a special service. The rimed couplet is first mentioned, and, with some contempt, restricted "onely" to "lang historeis, and zit are nocht verse."<sup>3</sup> "For the discriptioun of Heroique actis, Martiall and Knechtly faittis of armes," an unusual stanza of nine decasyllabic lines containing but two rimes is suggested. This stanza, like most of the several other derivatives of the *rime-royal*, is traceable to Chaucer; the greater part of *The Complaynte of Faire Anelyda upon Fals Arcyte*, which forms the latter portion of the poem, *Anelyda and Arcyte*, being written in it; while *The Complaynte of Mars* shows its earlier form in less restricted rime.<sup>4</sup> Guest calls this a peculiarly Scotch measure, from its use by Dunbar in his *Golden Targe*, and by Gawin Douglass in his *Palice of Honour*. Dr. Schipper also mentions the fact that Lindesay has

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. III.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 112-13.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Gascoigne's mention of "riding rime," above; Campion's and Daniel's objections, below; and see Guest, *Hist. of Engl. Rythms*, p. 526.

<sup>4</sup> See Chaucer's Works, Riverside Edition, ii, pp. 376 and 362; Dr. Skeat's *Chaucer, The Minor Poems*, pp. 110 and 310; and Schipper, *Engl. Metrik.* 1, § 179.



employed it in the epilogue to his poem *The Dream*.<sup>1</sup> What the author calls the *ballat royal* follows, "for heich and graue subiectis," a decasyllabic stanza of eight lines, derivable in name and in form from the popular stanza of seven lines called by Gascoigne the *rhythme-royal*, and subsequently *rime-royal*, and ultimately referable to the *chant-royal* of the French.<sup>2</sup> The real *rime-royal*, which King James calls the "Troilus verse," from Chaucer's use of it in *Troilus and Cryseyde*, is next recommended "for tragicall materis, complaintis or testamentis,"<sup>3</sup> but restricted, contrary to the Chaucerian usage, to two instead of three rimes. Lastly, the sonnet is named, which is to be used "for compendious praysing of any bukes, or the authoris thairof, or ony argumentis of vther historeis, quhair sindrie sentences and change of purposis are requyrit." King James gives an octosyllabic stanza of six verses, composed of a quatrain of alternate rimes and a final couplet, which he calls "Commoun verse," and adds that this and "all kyndis of cuttit and broken verse, quair of new formes are daylie inventit according to the Poëtis pleasour," are mete "in materis of loue."<sup>4</sup> Finally a word of Tumbling verse, which the author thus explains:

Ze man obserue that thir Tumbling verse flowis not on that fassoun, as vtheris dois. For all vtheris keipis the reule quhilk I gaue before, To wit, the first fute short the secound lang and sa furth. Quhair as thir hes twa short, and ane lang throuch all the lyne, quhen they keip ordour: albeit the maist pairt of thame be out of ordour, & keipis na kynde nor reule of *Flowing*, & for that cause are callit *Tumbling* verse.<sup>5</sup>

Another name which James also uses is *Rouncefallis* verse, and, as we have seen, he recommends this "for flyting and inuectiues."

"These juvenile criticisms," as Drake calls them, are of comparatively little value, and may verily be termed the "essayes of

<sup>1</sup> See Guest, *Hist. of Engl. Rythms*, p. 643, and Schipper, *Engl. Metrik*, as above. For King James' mention of this metre see *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, p. 114. The arrangement of rimes was *aabaabbab*.

<sup>2</sup> Gascoigne's *Certayne Notes*, Ed. Arber, p. 38, and Guest, *Hist. of Engl. Rythms*, p. 639. See also Skeat's *Specimens of Engl. Literature*, iii, p. 41, and Schipper, *Engl. Metrik*, i, § 177.

<sup>3</sup> *Ane Schort Treatise*, *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, pp. 144-15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.



a prentise" in comparison with almost any of the other works here discussed. Gascoigne's influence is the only one evident. and the royal author's self-confident assumption: "Quhat I speik of Poesie now, I speik of it, as being come to mannis age and perfectioun, quhair as then [*i. e.*, in old times], it was bot in the infancie and chylldheid,"<sup>1</sup> is ignorant and foolish in the extreme, when we consider the brilliant array of earlier Scottish poets, two of James' own ancestors among them. It is, however, but just in this estimate to consider that the author has two excellent pleas, his youth and his kingship. It is likely that had the boy king's worthy and learned old tutor, George Buchanan, lived a few years longer, this crude "essay of a prentise" would have come to us in a better form, if indeed it had been published at all.

### III

We have already seen that the purpose of introducing classic versification into English was by no means a new one in the days of Ascham; as Dean Church says of the period just before the publication of the *Shepherd's Calendar*: "the rage for 'artificial versifying' was for the moment in the air."<sup>2</sup> Haselwood notes that "Roman numbers" were attempted as early as 1577 by Thomas Blener Hasset and called "a new kind of poetry." Blener Hasset was the author of *The Second part of the Mirror for Magistrates* and his *Complaynt of Cadwallader* is written in "Roman iambics." He "has the following observations in the succeeding Induction :"<sup>3</sup>

Fyrst tell me, Inquisition, wyll you peruse this mans meterlesse Tragedy as he hath pronounst it. Good Memory geue me your aduise, for it agreeth very wel with the Roman verse called Iambus, which consisteth on sixe

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Preface, p. 100. It is, however, but just to note that Schipper calls this treatise, "die kleine aber wichtige Abhandlung von King James." *Engl. Metr.*, ii, p. 223. For two very different estimates see *Book-Lore*, iii, p. 40, and *Censura Literaria*, Ed. 1815, iii, p. 382.

<sup>2</sup> *Spenser, Men of Letter Series*, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Blener Hasset's metre is nothing but an unrimed Alexandrine, in which he "affects alliteration, and never refuses either middle or final rime, if it readily presents itself." Guest, *Hist. of Engl. Rythms*, p. 521, and Schipper, *Engl. Metr.*, ii, p. 190. *The Complaynt of Cadwallader* occupies fols. 36-40 of the ed. of 1578.



feete, euery foote on two syllables, one short and another long, so proper for the Englishe tounge, that it is greate maruaile that these ripewitted gentlemen of England haue not left their Gotish kinde of ryming, . . . . and imitated the learned Latines and Greekes. O what braue beames of goodly tymber might be found amongst Churchyardes Chippes, if he had not affected the rhyming order of his predecessors? Which Meeter made not onely hym inferiour vnto Horace, but it also made a great inequalitye to be betwixt Buchurst and Homer: betwixt Phaer and Virgill: betwixt Turberuille and Tibullus: betwixt Golding and Ouid; betwixt George Gascon and Seneca: for al these coming neare vnto Marot whom they did imitate, did put a great distance betwixt them, and the Latines, wyth whom they might haue binne equal, euen wyth as litle labour, and wyth much more prayse, and renowne. Truely (quoth Mercury) let it be as it is, you shall see good sport shortly. I smyle to see how Zoilous and Momus will crie out; O vayne glorious heade, whiche now for a singularitie dooth indeuour to erect a newe kinde of poetrie in England.<sup>1</sup>

In 1580 Gabriel Harvey published *Three Proper and wittie, familiar Letters, lately passed between two Uniuersitie men: touching the Earthquake in Aprill last, and our English reformed Versifying*; <sup>2</sup> and later, in the same year, *Two other verie commendable Letters, of the same mens writing: both touching the aforesaid Artificiall Versifying, and certaining other Particulars*:<sup>3</sup> both made up of letters passed between him and Edmund Spenser. The order of their writing requires that the *Two Letters* be read first; the earlier of these is dated October 5th, 1579; the others were all written after April, 1580. Nashe is probably right in his charge that Harvey was wholly responsible for the publication of these letters. Nashe says:

. . . . . You were yong in years, . . . when you priuately wrote the letters that afterward (by no other but your selfe) were publiquely diuulged. . . . .

Signior Immerito (so called because he was and is his friend undeservedly) was counterfeitly brought in to play a part in that Enterlude of Epistles that was hist at, thinking his uery name . . . was able to make an ill matter good. . . . .

I durst on my credit vndertake Spencer was no way priuie to the committing of them to print.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Second part of the Mirror for Magistrates*, Ed. 1578, the Induction following the *Complaynt of Cadwallader*, fol. 40.

<sup>2</sup> *Works of Gabriel Harvey*, Ed. Grosart, i, pp. 28-150.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 1-28.

<sup>4</sup> *Foure Letters Confuted*, *Works of Thomas Nashe*, Ed. Grosart, ii, pp. 231, 233.



And elsewhere he adds of the *Welwiller's Epistle* prefixed: "the compositor that set it, swore to mee it came under his owne hand [*i. e.*, Harvey's] to bee printed."<sup>1</sup>

It is usual to call Gabriel Harvey "a fantastic pedant," to arraign him as answerable for all the absurdities of these attempts at classic versification, to belabor him for trying to seduce such men as Sidney and Spenser from the paths of poetic rectitude, and to end with the famous quotation: "If I never deserve any better remembrance, let me be epitaphed the Inventor of the English Hexameter." It is curious to note the inaccuracy of this sort of literary gossip. This famous utterance of Harvey's has been constantly misquoted, at least as to its context.<sup>2</sup> We shall quote the passage entire as bearing immediately upon the subject. It is to be remembered that Harvey in his *Four Letters and certaine Sonnets* is answering an attack or, at the least, a supposed attack already made upon him in certain previous pamphlets.<sup>3</sup> Thus he speaks in justification of his much ridiculed design to reform English verse:

It goeth somewhat hard in my harsh Legend, when the father of Musicke must be mocked, not Tubalcain, as he mistearmeth him, but Tuball, whom Genesis voutsafeth honourable mention: and the Hexameter verse flouted; whereof neither Homer in Greeke, nor Virgil in Latin, (how valorous Autors?) nor Alexander in conquest, nor Augustus in maiesty, (how puissaunt Princes?) were ashamed; but accompted it the onely gallant trompet of braue, and Heroicall Acts: and I wis, the English is nothing too good to imitat the Greeke and Latine, or other eloquent Languages, that honour the Hexameter, as the soueraigne of verses, and the high Controwler of Rimes. If I neuer deserue anye better remembraunce, let me rather be Epitaphed, The Inuentor of the English Hexameter; whom learned M. Standihurst imitated in his Virgill; and excellent Sir Philip Sidney disdained not to follow in his *Arca-*

<sup>1</sup> *Haue with you to Saffron-Walden, Ibid.*, iii, p. 188.

<sup>2</sup> This misquotation will be found in Brydges, *Cens. Lit.*, i, p. 402; in Drake, *Sh. and his Times*, i, p. 457; Craik, *Hist. of Eng. Lit.*, iii, p. 63; Grey's *Life of Sidney*, p. 24, where Dr. Farmer is made answerable for it (see his *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare*, in Malone's *Sh.*, i, p. 327). Even Dr. Grosart, in his edition of Harvey, makes the same mistake, *Harvey*, i, xlvi, and Mr. Arber repeats it in his edition of Standihurst's *Virgil*, p. vii. See the probable original intentional misapplication. Nashe's Works, Ed. Grosart, ii, p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> See Greene's *Quip for an Upstart Courtier*, Greene, Ed. Grosart, XI, *passim.*, and Dr. Grosart's remarks upon the origin of the Nashe-Harvey controversy, Nashe, i, p. liii. The most violent of these attacks upon Harvey were successfully suppressed. Greene, Dr. Grosart's Note, XI, p. 206.



*dia*, & elsewhere: then be chronicled, The greene maister of Blacke Arte: or the founder of vgly oathes: or the father of misbegotten *Infortunatus*: or the Scriuner of Crossbiters: or as one of his own sectaries termed him, the Patriarch of shifters. Happy man I, if these two be my hainousest crimes, and deadliest sinnes: To bee the Inventor of the English Hexameter, and to be orderlie clapt in the Fleete for the foresaide Letters.<sup>1</sup>

From this it cannot but become perfectly plain that the whole is in character an apology, not a foolish boast. Dean Church's account is far nearer the truth than the usual one. "He [Harvey] was one who, with his classical learning, had little belief in the resources of his mother-tongue, and he was one of the earliest and most confident supporters of a plan, then fashionable, for reforming English verse, by casting away its natural habits and rhythms, and imposing upon it the law of the classical metres."<sup>2</sup> Into that nice question, whether Gabriel Harvey was "a fantastical pedant" or not, we cannot enter here, but will refer the whole matter to his contemporary enemy, Tom Nashe, and his posthumous foe, Dr. Grosart, not forgetting poor Harvey's one friend and his able essay, called by Dr. Grosart Professor Morley's "pugnacious apology, which he entitled cleverly *Hobbinol*."<sup>3</sup> Whatever Harvey's faults and absurdities, the author of the Life of Spenser, mentioned above, is entirely correct in adding of Harvey in our special connection: "It must be said, that though his enthusiasm for English hexameters is of a piece with the puritan use of Scripture texts in divinity and morals, yet there is no want of hard-headed shrewdness in his remarks; indeed, in his rules for the adaptation of English words and accents to classical metres he shows clearness and good sense in apprehending the conditions of the problem, while Sidney and Spenser still appear confused and uncertain."<sup>4</sup>

Whoever originated the idea, and although it is true, in Hallam's words, that this "injudicious endeavor to substitute the Latin metres for those congenial to our language met with no more

<sup>1</sup> Harvey's *Foure Letters and certaine Sonnets*. Ed. Grosart, i, pp. 181-82.

<sup>2</sup> *Spenser, Men of Letters Series*, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> See Nashe's *Strange Newes* and other tracts, Ed. Grosart; Dr. Grosart's Memorial-Introduction to Harvey's Works, *ib.*, i, p. xliii, both in the *Huth Library*; and Prof. Morley's Essay, *Spenser's Hobbinol, Fortnightly Review*, xi, pp. 274-283.

<sup>4</sup> *Spenser, Men of Letters Series*, p. 19.



success than it deserved," it cannot but excite our interest when we remember that "Sidney and even Spenser were, for a moment, seduced into approbation of it,"<sup>1</sup> and went even further to practice it and to found a club for its promulgation.

Mr. Gosse tells us : "The Areopagus finds its niche in every handbook of literature, but it is noticeable that we know extremely little about it. Dean Church speaks of it as a club of country poets, suddenly electrified into action by advice from Gabriel Harvey. I do not think myself that Harvey possessed so much influence."<sup>2</sup> "Your new-founded ἀρειωνπαγον I honoure more," says Harvey, "than you will or can suppose : and make greater accompte of the twoo worthy gentlemenne, than of the two hundreth *Dionysii Areopagitae*, or the verie notablest Senatours, that euer Athens dydde affourde of that number."<sup>3</sup> "This," continues Mr. Gosse, "seems to point to a society for reforming English versification founded by Sidney and Dyer, into which Spenser had already been admitted, . . . . and into which Gabriel Harvey was extremely anxious to enter. . . . It seems probable that Harvey never enjoyed more than the privilege of being a university referee to advise the young Areopagites whether their English hexameters and tribrachs scanned or no."<sup>4</sup> Spenser's words in full are :

As for the twoo worthy Gentlemen, Master Sidney and Master Dyer, they haue me, I thanke them, in some vse of familiarity : of whom, and to whome, what speache passeth for youre credite and estimation, I leaue yourself to conceiue, hauing alwayes so well conceiued of my unfained affection and zeale towards you. And nowe they haue proclaimed in their ἀρειωπάγω a general surceasing and silence of balde Rymers, and also of the verie beste to : in steade whereof, they haue, by authoritie of their whole Senate, prescribed certaine Lawes and rules of Quantitie of English sillables for English Verse : hauing had thereof already great practise, and drawen mee to their faction.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hallam, *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, Ed. 1872, ii, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup> *Sir Philip Sidney, Contemporary Review*, vol. 1, p. 642. I do not find Mr. Gosse's reference to Dean Church's remark. The tenor of the two quotations above is directly opposed to it.

<sup>3</sup> I complete Mr. Gosse's quotation. Harvey to Spenser. *Two other verie commendable Letters*. Grosart's Harvey, i, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Gosse's Essay, as above, p. 643.

<sup>5</sup> Spenser to Harvey, *Two other verie commendable Letters*, Harvey, Ed. Grosart, i, p. 7.



There is much more exchange of thoughts, upon "oure new famous enterprise for Exchanging of Barbarous and Balductiun Rymes with Artificial Verses" between Harvey and Spenser<sup>1</sup> and much advice, formulated of rules and criticism, on the part of Harvey. It appears, moreover, that Harvey was not the only adviser to the Areopagus, but that a certain Master Drant<sup>2</sup> had likewise formulated a prosody, and that Harvey, in his verses, had "once or twice" made "a breache in Maister Drants Rules,"<sup>3</sup> although declaring, at the same time, that he "would gladly be acquainted with M. Drants Prosody," and commending himself to M. Sidney's iudgment and gentle M. Immeritos Obseruations."<sup>4</sup> In another place Harvey insinuates that an error in one of Spenser's iambics "may rather proceede of his Master, M. Drants Rule, than of him selfe;"<sup>5</sup> and elsewhere declares characteristically: "Mine owne Rules and Precepts of Arte, I beleeeue wil fal out not greatly repugnant, though peraduenture somewhat different."<sup>6</sup>

As to the *personnel* of the Areopagus, Spenser and Sidney are too well known for much further mention here. Dyer,<sup>7</sup> on

<sup>1</sup> Harvey to Spenser, *Three proper, familiar, wittie Letters*, Harvey, *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Drant, a pensioner and fellow of Saint John's College, Cambridge, received considerable preferment in the Church. He died in 1578, probably at about the age of 37. He is chiefly remembered as the first English translator of Horace, and for a version of the first five books of the *Iliad*. Although the author of many works, none of them have been reprinted, or, indeed, deserve to be reprinted. He appears to have been a preacher of no mean ability and a man of no little wit, as appears from some quotations in Warton's *Hist. of Engl. Poetry*, iii, p. 344. Of his *Prosody* and his relations with Sidney and Spenser nothing is known, save the allusions quoted in the text. See *Athen. Cantab.*, i, p. 382, and Warton, as above, iii, p. 264, *et passim*, to which may be added Meres' mention of Drant among the Epigrammatists, *Palladis Tamia*, Haselwood's *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, p. 155.

<sup>3</sup> Spenser to Harvey, *Two other verie commendable Letters*, Harvey, Ed. Grosart, i, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Harvey to Spenser, *Three proper, familiar, wittie Letters*, *Ibid.*, p. 76.

<sup>5</sup> Harvey to Spenser, *Two other verie commendable Letters*, *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Harvey to Spenser, *Three proper, familiar, wittie Letters*, *Ibid.*, p. 76. See also the following: "I long sithence founde by experience, how Dranting of Verses and Euphuizing of sentences did edifie," *Ibid.*, ii, p. 131.

<sup>7</sup> The scanty remains of Sir Edward Dyer's poetry contain no specimen of the "new versifying." For a succinct account of Sir Edward Dyer see *Dic. Nat. Biog.*, xvi, p. 238. Allusions to Dyer are frequent among his contemporaries. Puttenham commends him "for Elegie most sweete solempne, and of high conceit," *The Arte of English Poesie*, Ed. Arber, p. 77; and Harvey classifies him among "divine poets," and with Sidney as a "poetic pattern," punning on his name as "a hyacynth of azure *die*," etc. See *Works of Harvey*, Ed. Grosart, ii, p. 266; i, p. 86; and *ibid.*, pp. 244 and 266. From Harvey's *Letter Book*, Ed. Grosart i, p. III, it appears that Spenser, in 1579, obtained some of Harvey's poems and published them with a dedication "to the right worshipfull gentleman and famous courtier, Master Edwarde Diar, in a manner oure onlye Inglishe poett." In what *manner*, however, does not appear.



the contrary, is not so well known, and one or two points as to the others call for a word in this connection. Mr. Gosse, in the essay alluded to above, has ably justified Sidney's leadership of the Areopagus—if indeed it be deemed that justification is necessary—in these words: “The English verse which he [Sidney] saw about him was the verse of Turberville and Churchyard, of Tusser, and of the blood and thunder translators, the verse which he himself attempted in the *Lady of the May*. There was no structural vigor in English versification, no knowledge of prosody, no ambition for a fine style. Gascoigne had feebly and tamely hinted at better things; and, now Gascoigne was gone, and Whetstone had celebrated him in the old dreadful manner,<sup>1</sup> Sidney and Dyer determined upon ‘the general surceasing and silence of bald rimers,’ and the adoption of fixed rules for quantitative metre. It could not be achieved, the genius of the language being opposed to it, but it did the poets no harm to try. They learned from these experiments a great deal about the value of syllables and the general ductility of the language, which no other apprenticeship would have given them.”<sup>2</sup>

As to Spenser, notwithstanding much seeming enthusiasm,<sup>3</sup> and although the *Shepherd's Calendar* still shows the influence of the Areopagus, it is undoubtedly true that he was fast “breaking away from the bondage of his friend, while Sidney was still pursuing the vain attempt, as the asclepiads and anacreontics of the *Arcadia* are enough to prove.”<sup>4</sup> There seems no little reason to doubt Spenser's seriousness as to the new venture; this may be inferred from the following passage, in which he clearly shows his knowledge of the real difficulty and of its absurdity:<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Whetstone's *Remembrance of the wel imployed life and godly end of George Gascoigne*, Ed. Arber, pp. 17-29; also reprinted in Chalmers's *English Poets*, ii, p. 457.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Gosse's Essay on Sidney, *Contemporary Review*, 1, p. 643.

<sup>3</sup> “But I am of late, more in love with my English Versifying than with Ryming whyche I should haue done long since if I would then haue followed yr. counsell.” Spenser to Harvey, *Two other verie commendable Letters*, etc. Harvey, Ed. Grosart, i, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Mr. Gosse's Essay on Sidney, *Contemporary Review*, 1, p. 644.

<sup>5</sup> See Craik's *Sketches of Literature*, etc., iii, p. 68. Dr. Grosart considers that this letter “bubbles over with raillery even to burlesque on Spenser's part—Nashe himself not exceeding him in his showing up of the Hexameter folly.” *Memorial Introduction*, Harvey, Ed. Grosart, i, p. xlvi. “It seems to me that Spenser only played with it and that he never would have perfected the hexameter verse.” Dr. Grosart's *Life of Spenser*, his Ed. of Spenser, i, p. 70.



I like your late Englishe Hexameters so exceedingly well, that I also enure my Penne sometime to that kinde; whyche I fynd indeede, as I haue heard you often defende in worde, neither so harde, nor so harshe, that it will easily and fairly yeelde it selfe to our Moother tongue. For the onely, or chiefest hardnesse, whych seemeth, is in the accente: whyche sometimes gapeth, and as it were yawneth ilfavouredly, coming shorte of that it should, and sometime exceeding the measure of the Number, as in *Carpenter*, the middle sillable being used shorte in speache, when it shall be read long in Verse, seemeth like *a lame Gosling that draweth one legge after hir*: and *Heauen* being vsed shorte as one sillable, when it is in verse stretched out with a *Diastole* is like *a lame Dogge that holdes up one legge*. But it is to be wonne with Custome, and rough words must be subdued with Use. For why a Gods name may not we, as else the Greekes, haue the kingdome of our owne Language, and measure our Accentes by the sounde, reseruing that Quantitie to the Verse? Loe, here I let you see my olde vse of toying in Ryme, turned into your artificial straightnesse of verse by this *Tetrasticon*.<sup>1</sup>

Spenser was not oblivious to other defects in the new system, and does not hesitate, in the same letter, to complain of the multiplicity of rules.

I would heartily wish, you would either send me the Rules and Precepts of Arte, which you obserue in quantities, or else followe mine, that M. Philip Sidney gave me, being the very same which M. Drant deuised, but enlarged with M. Sidney's own judgement, and augmented by my obseruations, that we might both accorde and agree in one: leaste we overthrowe one an other, and be ouer thrown of the rest.<sup>2</sup>

Spenser evidently regarded the whole matter as entirely experimental, and apparently supposed the exchange of verses between him and Harvey confidential.<sup>3</sup> The fact that Spenser was already seriously at work on *The Faërie Queene*, and, indeed, must already have completed a considerable part of it, adds weight to this view of the case.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Spenser to Harvey, *Three popular, familiar, wittie Letters*. Harvey, Ed. Grosart, i, pp. 35, 36. See also below, p. 37, Spenser's account of a proposed *Epithalamion Thamesis*—surely a fitting subject for the hexameter—in which the poet is to describe “all the Riuers throughout England . . . and their righte names and right passage, etc, . . . tracing and dogging oute all their Course, til they fall into the Sea.” This sounds like the keynote of the famous but much later *Polyolbion*. It is curious that Collier should offer the supposition that the *Epithalamion* “may have been written in what is now called the Spenserian stanza.” Collier's Spenser, i, p. xix.

<sup>2</sup>Spenser to Harvey, *Three Popular, familiar, wittie Letters*. p. 36.

<sup>3</sup>See above, where Nashe denies that Spenser was a party to their publication.

<sup>4</sup>“In good faith I had once againe nigh forgotten your *Faerie Queene*, howbeit by good chauce I haue nowe sent her home at last, neither in better or worse case than I founde her.” Harvey to Spenser, *Three popular, familiar, wittie Letters*, Harvey, Ed. Grosart, i, p. 94. The preface of these letters, *To the courteous Reader*, bears date June 19th, 1580.



In this connection we cannot too deeply deplore the loss of *The English Poet*, Spenser's work in the technique of his art, which was unfortunately suffered to perish in manuscript. The existence of this work is thus brought to our notice in the argument of the tenth *Aegloga* of *The Shepherd's Calendar*:

In Cuddie is set out the perfecte paterne of a Poete, whiche, finding no maintenaunce of his state and studies, complayneth of the contempte of Poetrie, and the causes thereof: Specially having bene in all ages, and even amongst the most barbarous, alwayes of singular accoumpt and honor, and being indede so worthy and commendable an arte; or rather no arte, but a divine gift and heavenly instinct not to bee gotten by labour and learning, but adorned with both, and poured into the witte by a certain *Ἐνθουσιασμός* and celestial inspiration, as the Author herof els where at large discourseth in his booke called *The English Poete*, which booke being lately come to my hands, I mynde also by Gods grace, vpon further aduisement, to publish.<sup>1</sup>

It is unlikely that E. K. ever fulfilled this purpose; if he did, all traces of the work have perished except his own statement, unless the allusion to an *Arte of Poetry* in *An Epitaphe vpon Poet Spencer* by Nicholas Breton in his *Melancholike Humours in Verse of Diverse Natures*, 1600,<sup>2</sup> can be contorted into a reference to the lost work. Although there is some apparent force in Collier's remark that "the words, *Art of Poetry*, coming, as they do, immediately after the enumeration of other productions by Spenser, must . . . . refer to his lost critical essay;"<sup>3</sup> and although Dr. Grosart feels so certain about the matter that he exclaims, with the admirable zeal that has always characterized this indefatigable investigator, "surely it must one day be recovered, since it seems to have been well known in 1600,"<sup>4</sup> we cannot be so readily satisfied. The third and fourth stanzas of Breton's Epitaph run as follows:

<sup>1</sup> Works of Spenser, Ed. Collier, i, p. 114, or Ed. Grosart, ii, p. 227. *The English Poet* has received frequent mention, see Bibliographer i, p. 129, Todd's, Collier's and Grosart's ed. of Spenser.

<sup>2</sup> Works of Breton, *Chertsey Worthies Library*, Ed. Grosart, i, "*Melancholike Humours*," p. 15.

<sup>3</sup> Works of Spenser, Ed. Collier, i, p. cxlviii.

<sup>4</sup> Works of Breton, as above, p. 16, note.



Fairy Queene shew fairest Queene,  
 How her faire in thee is seene :  
 Sheepeheards Calendar set downe,  
 How to figure best a clowne,  
 As for Mother *Hubberts* Tale,  
 Cracke the nut, and take the shale :  
 And for other workes of worth,  
 (All too good to wander forth,)  
 Grieve that euer you were wrot  
 And your author be forgot.

Farewell Arte of Poetry,  
 Scorning idle foolery :  
 Farewell true conceited Reason,  
 Where was neuer thought of treason :  
 Farewell Judgement, with inuention,  
 To describe a hearts intention :  
 Farewell wit, whose sound and sense  
 Shewe a poets excellence.  
 Farewell, all in one together,  
 And with Spencers garland, wither.<sup>1</sup>

Collier quotes the epitaph in full in his life of Spenser, prefixed to his edition of Spenser's works, and carefully italicizes the words, *Fairy Queene*, *Sheepeheards Calendar*, *Mother Hubberts' tale* and *Arte of Poetry*.<sup>2</sup> If the juxtaposition of these titles in a previous stanza is worth anything, the closer position of expressions in the same construction and in the same stanza is certainly worth more. If Spenser did write an *Arte of Poetry*, he scarcely wrote books entitled: *true conceited Reason*, *Judgement*, *with inuention*, *wit*, *whose sound etc.*, or compiled them *all in one together*. We may regret the overthrow of a pretty theory; but Breton certainly did not allude, however remotely, to any work of Spenser's on the subject of poetics in the passage quoted above.

We heartily join in the universal expression of regret, that a work on such a subject and from the hand of a man so eminently fitted to treat it should have been suffered to perish

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 15 and 16.

<sup>2</sup> Works of Spenser, Ed. Collier, i, p. cxlvii. Collier may have derived the hint for forcing down this theory from Sir Edgerton Brydges, who italicizes the words *Arte of Poetrie* in his edition of Breton's *Melancholike Humours*, 1815, but makes no remark thereon.



unpublished. Dr. Grosart's suggestion, although no more than a conjecture, is not without interest here: "If not bodily, yet largely, I like to think," says he, "that we have *The English Poet* utilized at least in Sidney's *Apology* or *Defense of Poetry*."<sup>1</sup> And again, "I may be wrong, but I have a *souçon* of suspicion that if Sir Philip Sidney had lived to have published his *Defense of Poesie* himself, there would have been an acknowledgment of indebtedness to Spenser in its composition. Is it utterly improbable . . . that Sir Philip should have incorporated or adapted *The English Poet* of Spenser in his *Defense*? I trow not. Only thus can I understand its suppression when 'finished' and ready for the press."<sup>2</sup>

Any further discussion of the tenets of the Areopagus would be superfluous. Notwithstanding Spenser's apostasy, which became complete long before his publication of the first three books of *The Faërie Queene* in 1590; and notwithstanding that Sidney, a far more conservative and cautious poet than Spenser, had almost freed himself from "the asclepiads and anacreontics of the Arcadia" at the time of his death, the project remained a favorite one among the smaller learned poets long after its essential failure had been conclusively demonstrated by the immortal works of the age. Classic versification had not failed in English for want of a fair trial; Harvey and the Areopagus were not alone. Richard Standyhurst essayed the task by sheer brute force, and Thomas Watson, "the sweetest of the purely amatory poets of Elizabeth's reign," failed at it despite his acknowledged skill as a Latinist.<sup>3</sup> It is a notable instance of the hold which the idea had taken upon the minds of the authors of a later day that even Thomas Campion, a musician, and one of the most tuneful of the poets of his day, should have supported the project in a modified form long after its practical disproof.<sup>4</sup> Among other classical metrists may be named William Webbe, author of *A Discourse of English Poetrie*,

<sup>1</sup> Works of Spenser, Ed. Grosart, i, p. 99, and Appendix, *ibid.*, p. 453. See also Breton's *Melancholike Humours*, as above, p. 16, note.

<sup>2</sup> Works of Spenser, Ed. Grosart, i, pp. 453-54. See also the author's note on this subject, *Mod. Lang. Notes*, June, 1890.

<sup>3</sup> Morley's *First Sketch of Engl. Lit.*, p. 412.

<sup>4</sup> See his *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, below.



*together with the Author's judgment touching the reformation of our English Verse,*<sup>1</sup> published in 1586. Webbe was evidently well acquainted with the foregoing controversy, and fully in sympathy with the laudable endeavors of the Areopagus. But, while acknowledging the inferiority of English poetry, and following Ascham in his denunciation of rime as a barbarous invention of "Hunes and Gothians," Webbe is not quite so ready as Harvey to accept the introduction of classic metres as a panacea, although still willing to continue the experiment. In his preface he exclaims :

What credit they [the Lawreat Masters of Englande] might winne to theyr natie speeche, what enormities they might wipe out of English Poetry, what a fitte vaine they might frequent, wherein to shewe forth their worthie faculties : if English Poetrie were truely reformed, and some perfect platforme or *Prosodia* of versifying were by them ratified and sette downe : eyther in imitation of Greekes and Latines, or where it would skant abyde the touch of theyr Rules, the like observations selected and established by the naturall affectation of the speeche.<sup>2</sup>

Webbe thus expresses his opinion of the classic versification in full :

I am fully and certainlie perswaded, that if the true kind of versifying in immitation of Greekes and Latines, had beene practised in the English tongue, and put in vse frome time to tyme by our Poets, who might haue continually beene mending and pollyshing the same, euery one according to their seuerall giftes : it would long ere this haue aspyred to as full perfection, as anie other tongue whatsoeuer. . . . Now it seemeth not currant for an English verse to runne vpon true quantity, and those feete which the Latines use, because it is straunge, and the other barbarous custome, beeing within compasse of euery base witt, hath worne out of credite or estimation. But if our wryters, being of learning iudgment, would rather infringe this curious custome, then omitte the occasion of enlarging the credite of their native speeche, and theyr owne prayses, by practising that commendable kinde of wryting in true verse : then, no doubt, as in other partes of learning, so in Poetrie, shoulde not stoupe to the best of them all in all maner of ornament and comlinessse. But some object that our wordes are nothing ressemblant in nature to theirs, and therefore not possible to bee framed with any good grace after their use : but cannot we then as well as the Latines did, alter the canon of the rule according to the quality of our worde, and where our wordes and theyrs wyll agree, there to iumpe with them, where they will not

<sup>1</sup> See below.

<sup>2</sup> *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, Ed. Arber, p. 19.



agree, there to establish a rule of our owne to be directed by? Likewise, for ye tenor of the verse might we not (as Horace dyd in the Latine) alter their proportions to what sortes we listed, and to what we sawe would best become the nature of the thing handled, or the quallity of the wordes? Surely it is to be thought that if any one of sound iudgment and learning, should putte forth some famous worke, contayning dyuers formes of true verses, fitting the measures, according to the matter: it would of it selfe be a sufficient authority without any prescription of rules, to the most part of Poets, for them to follow and by custome to ratify. For sure it is, that the rules and Principles of Poetrie were not precisely followed and observed of the first beginners and wryters of Poetrie, but were selected and gathered seuerally out of theyr workes for the direction and behoofe of their followers. And indeede, he that shall with heedefull iudgment make tryall of the English wordes, shall not finde them so grosse or unapt, but that they wyll become any one of ye most accustomed sortes of Latine or Greeke verses meetely, and run thereon somewhat currently.<sup>1</sup>

Following this we have the usual careful discussion of the *Spondæus*, *Pyrrichus* and *Amphibrach*, with the succeeding arbitrary assumption of shortness or length to such and such English syllables as do not "notoriously impugne the Latine rules," but which certainly do throw the mother tongue into convulsions. Finally, we are informed that "the most famous verse of all the rest is called the *Hexametrum Epicum*," and that "the first that attempted to practice thys verse in English should seeme to be the Earle of Surrey, who translated some part of Virgill into verse indeede but without regard to true quantity of Sillables:"<sup>2</sup> surely a strange mistake as to Surrey's blank verse. In short, Hallam is perhaps not much too harsh, when he speaks of Webbe as "a writer of little taste or ear for poetry," who "may be said to have avenged the wrong of English verse upon our great poet [Spenser], by travestyng *The Shepherd's Calendar* into sapphics."<sup>3</sup> So strong, indeed, was this passion for the classic verse, that even Puttenham, while avowing far more reasonable sentiments, as we shall see, as to the essential difference between the genius of our language and the classic tongues, is led into the following avowal:

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 67.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

<sup>3</sup> *Introduction to the Literature of Europe*, Ed. 1872, ii, p. 227-28.



th<sup>1</sup> Albeit . . . that for the most part wise and graue men doe naturally mislike with all sodaine innouations specially of lawes (and this the law of our auncient English Poesie), and therefore lately before we imputed it to a nice and scholasticall curiositie in such makers as haue sought to bring into our vulgar Poesie some of the auncient feete, to wit, the *Dactile* into verses *exameters*, as he that translated certaine bookes of *Virgil's Eneydos* in such measure and not vncommendably: if I should say otherwise it would make me seeme contradictorie to myselfe, yet for the information of our yong makers, and pleasure of all others who be delighted in noueltie, and to th' intent we may not seeme by ignorance or ouersight to omit any point of subtility, materiall or necessarie to our vulgar arte, we will in this present chapter and by our own idle obseruations shew how one may easily and commodiously lead all those feete of the auncients into our vulgar language.<sup>1</sup>

But of all the mighty champions among Hexametrists, Richard Standyhurst must be regarded as the staunchest; although any attempt to separate his "incomparable oddity and kitchen parlance" from his real learning must ever be attended with a complete destruction of the combined fabric. "As Chaucer has been called 'the well of English undefiled,' so might Standyhurst be denominated the common sewer of the language," says Mr. Arber, who with his usual diligence has collected much of the material about Standyhurst in his valuable preface to Standyhurst's *Four Books of the Æneid*.<sup>2</sup> We quote below a few lines of Standyhurst to show the worst that his tribe can do.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See his *Arte of English Poesie*, 1589, Ed. Arber, p. 126.

<sup>2</sup> *The English Scholar's Library, etc.*, No. 10. Introd., p. xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Dido's interest in Æneas and Ascanius, Cupid personating the latter, at her first entertainment of them, is thus detailed:

" But euer  
Shee doth eye thee presents: thee mopsy her phantasie lurcheth.  
On father Æneas his neck thee dandiprate hangeth.  
And to his great lyking his syre supposed he gayneth.  
Hee skips too Dido: thee Queene with curtesie cheereful  
Accepts thee princex: soomtyme she him claspeth in armes.  
Poore soule not wytting what Great God her hoatlye besiegeth;  
But this pretty peacock, etc."—Ed. Arber, p. 41.

Abraham Fraunce is not much better:

" Myrtle's due to Venice, green laurel due to Apollo,  
Corn to the lady Ceres, ripe grapes to the young merrie Bacchus."

From *England's Parnassus*, quoted in *Cens. Lit.*, i, p. 180.



It is, however, not to be supposed for a moment that the Hexametrists had it all their own way. Hall ridicules their "breathless dactyles and drawling spondees,"<sup>1</sup> and the redoubtable Thomas Nashe, Harvey's natural enemy, has many clever things to say of the absurdities of the English Hexameter, of which we can quote only the following:

The Hexamiter verse, I graunt to be a Gentleman of an auncient house (so is many an English begger), yet this Clyme of ours he cannot thriue in: our speech is too craggy for him to set his plough in: hee goes twitching and hopping in our language like a man running upon quagmires, vp the hill in one Syllable, and down the dale in another, retaining no part of that stately smooth gate, which he vaunts himselfe with amongst the Greeks and Latins.<sup>2</sup>

After showing the absurdity of considering Chaucer and Spenser the inferiors of Homer and Virgil and "farre ouerseene that they wrote not all their Poems in Hexamiter verses also," he follows with this remark on Standyhurst:

Master Standyhurst (though otherwise learned) trod a foule lumbering boystrous wallowing measure, in his translation of Virgil. He had neuer been praised by Gabriel for his labour, if therein hee had not bin so famously absurd.<sup>3</sup>

In an earlier passage Nashe thus accounts for the estimation in which Standyhurst was held:

Fortune the Mistres of change, with a pitying compassion respecting Master Standihursts praise, would that Phaer shoulde fall that hee might rise, whose heroicall Poetrie infired, I shoulde say inspired, with an hexameter furie, whateuer hissed barbarism, hath bin buried this hundred yeare: and reuiued by his ragged quill, such carterlie variety, as no hodge plowman in a countrie, but would haue held as the extremitie of clownerie.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The nimble dactyl striving to outgo  
The drawling Spondees pacing it below,  
The lingering spondees, laboring to delay  
The breathless dactyl with a sudden stay.

Bk. I, Sat. VI, Anderson's *British Poets*, ii, p. 733.

<sup>2</sup> Works of Thomas Nashe, Ed. Grosart, ii, p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238.

<sup>4</sup> *To the gentlemen Students*, preface to Greene's *Menaphon* by Thomas Nashe. Works of Greene, Ed. Grosart, vi, p. 20.



We shall conclude this portion of our subject—already too long—with a quotation from what Mr. Arber calls an “out and out Hexametrist” :

Right honored, worshipfull and gentell Reader, these Hexameters and Pentameters in Englishe, are misliked of many, because they are not yet come to their full perfection ; and specially of some, that are accounted and knowne to be Doctors and Singularly well learned and great Linguistes ; but especially of the plaine Rythmer, that scarce knows the footed quantitie or metricall scanning thereof, much lesse to reade them with a grace according to the same. But for him, I say, *Scientia nullum habet inimicum, praeter ignorantem*. Whose bookes are stufte with lines of prose, with a rythme in the end ; which euery fidler, or piper, can make vpon a theame giuen. Neuertheless, I confesse and acknowledge that we haue many excellent and singular good poets in this our age, as Maister Spenser, that was, Maister Gowlding, Doctor Phayer, Master Harrington, Daniell, and diuers others whom I reuerence in that kinde of prose-rythme ; wherein Spencer (without offence spoken) hath surpassed them all. I would to God they had done so well in trewe Hexameters : for they had then beautified our language. . . .

Therefore I reuerence Standihurst ; who, being but an Irish man, did first attempt to translate these foure bookes of Eneados. . . .

For at first Maister Ascham had much ado to make two or three verses in English : but now euery scholler can make some. What language so harsh, hard, or barbarous, that time and art will not amend ? . . .

This trewe kinde of Hexametered and Pentametered verse, will bring unto vs foure commodities. First it will enrich our speach with good and significant wordes : Secondly it will bring a delight and pleasure to the skilful Reader, when he seeth them formally compiled : and thirdly it will encourage and learne the goodly Students, that affect Poetry, and are naturally enclyned thereunto, to make the like : Fourthly it will direct a trewe Idioma, and will teach trewe Orthography. For as gould surpasseth leade : so the Hexameters surpasseth rythme prose.<sup>1</sup>

#### IV.

Returning to William Webbe, we must unquestionably credit him with the “most extensive piece of poetical criticism that had hitherto appeared,” and grant that his work was the first attempt at anything like a systematic consideration of the sub-

<sup>1</sup> *The First Booke of the Preservation of King Henry the VII, when he was but Earle of Richmond, grandfather of the Queenes Maiesty*. Compiled in english rythmical Hexameters. London, 1599. Quoted by Mr. Arber in his edition of Standihurst's Virgil, pp. xx and xxi.



ject of English poetics. In his *A Discourse of English Poetrie. Together with the Author's iudgment, touching the reformation of our English Verse*,<sup>1</sup> the subject of the special title of which has been already sufficiently treated, Webbe starts several topics of interest, while modestly avowing that he wrote "these fewe leaues to stirre vppe some other of meete ability, to bestowe trauaill in this matter."<sup>2</sup> We need not find fault with Drake's remark, who, misled by the title, says: "The chief purport of this pamphlet, now so rare that only three [two?] copies are known to exist, is to propose what the author terms 'a perfect platform or prosodia' of versifying, in imitation of the Greeks and Latins,"<sup>3</sup> since Mr. Arber's excellent reprint has put its real contents at the command of all scholars.

As Mr. Arber states, this treatise was written under three influences:<sup>4</sup> Ascham's *Scholemaster*, to which may be referred Webbe's account of the origin of rime and his belief in its essential unfitness; *The Paradise of Dainty Deuises*, which doubtless afforded him "sundrie kindes of rare deuises and pretty inuentions;" and the *Shepherd's Calendar*, which seems to have been almost sufficient to have shaken his scholarly leanings toward the classics. It is not difficult to add other sources, especially Gascoigne's *Certayne Notes*, and possibly Sidney's *Apologie*. Starting with the query, an undoubtedly just one in 1586, Why is English poetry inferior? and denying this to be due to poverty of wit or "rudenes and vnaptnes of our country," Webbe seeks to explain this by the want of "a perfect platforme or *prosodia*." Defining poetry and its origin, he passes the chief classical poets in review; and after granting Chaucer, who was "alwayes accounted the God of English Poets," to be "euen a true picture or perfect shape of a right poet," affirms: "I know no memorable worke written by any Poet in our English speeche

<sup>1</sup> Webbe calls himself "graduate," and his book was registered for printing Sept. 4th, 1586. Collier, *Extr. of Stat. Co.'s Regs.*, ii, p. 215, Ed. 1849.

<sup>2</sup> *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, Ed. Arber. Pref. *To the Noble Poets of England*, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Drake, *Sh. and His Times*, i, p. 463. Mr. Arber mentions only two copies as extant.

<sup>4</sup> *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, Ed. Arber, Introd. p. 9. For an interesting account of *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, see Oldy's *British Librarian*, quoted in full by Brydges, *Cens. Lit.*, iii, pp. 382-392.



untill twenty yeares past."<sup>1</sup> We could wish that it were less foreign to our purpose to pause here over some of Webbe's concise estimates of poets nearly his contemporaries—Skelton, "doubtles a pleasant conceyted fellowe," or "Master Barnabe Googe, a painefull furtherer of learning"—but we must let these pass, as well as the author's "vnaccountable rabble of ryming Ballet makers and compylers of senceles sonets."

Webbe's definition of poetry is worthy of note, as differing materially from the broader, if looser, conception of Sidney. It runs as follows :

English Poetry . . . beeing considered according to common custome and auncient vse, is, where any worke is learnedly compiled in measurable speeche, and framed in wordes contayning number or proportion of iust syllables, delighting the readers or hearers as well by the apt and decent framing of wordes in equall resemblance of quantity, commonly called verse, as by the skylfull handling of the matter whereof it is intreated.<sup>2</sup>

Again, take the following broad scope of poetical subject-matter with its succeeding classification :

Though Poetry is not debarred from any matter, which may be expressed by penne or speeche, yet for the better vnderstanding, and breefer method of thys discourse, I may comprehend the same in three sortes, which are Comicall, Tragicall, Histori[c]all. Vnder the first, may be contained all such Epigrammes, Elegies and delectable ditties, which the poets haue deuised respecting onely the delight thereof: in the seconde, all dolefull complaynts, lamentable chaunces, and whatsoeuer is poetically expressed in sorrow and heauines. In the third, we may comprise, the reste of all such matters, which is indifferent betweene the other two, doo commonly occupy the pennes of poets: such are the poeticall compyling of chronicles, the freendly greetings betweene freendes, and many sorts besides, which for the better distinction may be referred to one of these three kinds of Poetrie.<sup>3</sup>

As might be supposed, Webbe had not yet risen to the conception of poetry as a fine art, but considers it needful to justify the art as a sort of bitter-sweet, in which is contained "profitable counsaile yet . . . mingled with delight." Poetry has fortunately passed the age of apology, and we no longer so commonly read "Ovid's wanton bookes of loue" or "the impudent

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 30 and 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.



work of Luciane vnto young Schollers," that we need search for these poets' "many pithie and wise sentences" among "ye other stuff."

While on the topic of "heroicall workes," Webbe quotes Phaer's translation of Virgil largely, to prove that "the English tongue lacketh neyther variety nor currantnesse of phrase for any matter;" and, discussing Theocritus and Virgil in their *Eglogues*, hesitates not to say: "But nowe yet at ye last hath England hatched vppe one Poet of this sort, in my conscience comparable with the best in any respect: euen Master Sp: author of the Sheepeheardes Calender."<sup>1</sup>

Webbe then proceeds to a discussion of "the form and manner of our English verse," saying of rime:

Yet beeing so engrassed by custome, and frequented by the most parte, I may not utterly dissallowe it, least I should seeme to call in question the iudgment of all our famous wryters, which have wonne eternall prayse by theyr memorable workes compyled in that verse.<sup>2</sup> . . . .

There be three speciall notes necessary to be observed in the framing of our accustomed English Ryme: the first is that one meeter or verse be annswerable to another. . . . The seconde, to place the words in such sorte as none of them be wrested contrary to the naturall inclination or affectation of the same. . . . The thyrd, to make them fall together mutually in Ryme.<sup>3</sup>

"Of the kyndes of verse," which he says "are almost infinite," he enumerates but two, the verse of eight accents (sixteener), "commonly divided" with "ryme crosse wise," and the fourteener or undivided Septenary, which, he says, is "especially vsed of all the translatours of the Latine poets; then, "to avoyde tediousnesse and confusion," he concludes: "I wyll repeate onely the different sortes of verses out of the Sheepeheardes Kalender, which may well serue to beare authoritie in thys matter." This he does, in some cases scarcely giving more than an example. This is followed by the barest mention of staves—only the Powlters measure being given by name—a few of Gascoigne's rules for riming, and the hope

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 57.



that the "exact knowledge of versifying . . . . wilbe better and larger laid forth by others, to whom I refer many considerations in this treatise."<sup>1</sup>

There is one other point of interest which may be regarded as a survival of the affectations of a far earlier age; a matter touched upon, by the way, far more fully by Puttenham:<sup>2</sup>

Nowe the sundry kindes of rare deuises, and pretty inuentions which come from ye fine poetically vaine of manie in strange and unaccustomed manner, if I could report them, it were worthie my trauell: such are the turning of verses the infolding of wordes: the fine repetitions: the clarklie conueying of contraries, and manie such like. Whereof though I coulde sette downe manie: yet because I want bothe manie and the best kyndes of them, I will ouerpasse: onely pointing you to one or two.<sup>3</sup>

The treatise concludes with the expression of the author's opinions as to the classic attempts, a matter already discussed above.

As has been said, the book is a thoroughly honest one, and, although far from anything like a full treatment of the subject, exhibits a scholarly mind endeavoring to ascertain what English poetry really is and what it is likely to become.<sup>4</sup> Webbe's estimates of the worth of his contemporaries and earlier English poets is marked by much fairness and penetration; while his classical leanings were but natural, in view of his education and the great prestige which the classic authors still justly maintained. But the crowning glory of Webbe consists in the fact that, despite all his theories, he fixes instinctively upon *The Shepherd's Calendar* as the mark of a new era to come. Witness the following passage:

This place haue I purposely reserued for one, who if not only, yet in my iudgement principally deserueth the tytle of the rightest English Poet, that euer I read: that is the Author of the Sheepeheardes Kalender, intituled to the worthy Gentleman Master Phillip Sydney, whether it was Master Sp. or

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> See below.

<sup>3</sup> *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, Ed. Arber, p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> While presuming to differ with so eminent an authority with great reserve, we cannot but regard Dr. Schipper's estimate of Webbe as unnecessarily harsh. He says: "In metrischen Dingen fehlte es ihm aber ebenso sehr an klarer Einsicht in das Wesen der Sache, wie an sicherer Kenntnissen." *Engl. Metr.*, p. 10.



what rare Scholler in Pembroke Hall soeuer. . . . . Sorry I am that I can not find none other with whom I might couple him in this Catalogue, in hys rare gyft of Poetry.<sup>1</sup>

In another place he says of the same great poet :

Whose fine poetickall witt, and most exquisite learning, as he shewed abundantly in that peece of worke, [is] in my judgment, inferiour to the workes neither of Theocritus in Greeke, nor Virgill in Latine.<sup>2</sup>

For this, assuredly, we can pardon his subsequent words in praise of Harvey and his hexameters ; for this we can even forgive the unfortunate parody of *The Shepherd's Calendar* in sapphics.

We turn now to the consideration of a work which may be regarded as by far the most complete and elaborated specimen of Elizabethan criticism yet handed down to us. The title runs thus : *The Arte of English Poesie. Contrinued into three Bookes: The first of Poets and Poesie, the second of Proportion, the third of Ornament, At London, etc., 1589.*<sup>3</sup> The work was published anonymously, and, perhaps in view of the facts, has led to much unnecessary conjecture as to its authorship, having even been attributed to Spenser and Sidney.<sup>4</sup> Haselwood, on the authority of Ames, who says : "Webster Puttenham is allowed to have been the author,"<sup>5</sup> prints : "Webster, alias George Puttenham," on the title of his reprint of *The Arte of English Poesie*, and says that Puttenham is "first mentioned as a writer upon English verse by Richard Carew of Anthony, Esq.,<sup>6</sup> and identified as author of the present work in

<sup>1</sup> *A Discourse of English Poetrie*, Ed. Arber, p. 35.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup> This work was reprinted in 1811 by Joseph Haselwood to form the first volume of his *Ancient Critical Essays upon English Poets and Poësy*, of which only 200 copies were printed. Many of these were afterward destroyed by fire. Mr. Arber has since placed Puttenham among his valuable reprints.

<sup>4</sup> See Breton's supposed allusion to Spenser's *The English Poet*, above. See Haselwood's note, *Ancient Critical Essays*, i, p. vi, and Todd's Spenser, i, p. clviii.

<sup>5</sup> *Typographical Antiq.*, ed. 1786, p. 1252. Haselwood offers, as it appears, enough evidence to justify him in omitting the name "Webster." In general, as to Puttenham, see Haselwood's Introd. "Of the Author," *Ancient Critical Essays*, i, and Mr. Arber's Introd., pp. i-xvi.

<sup>6</sup> The passage of Carew alluded to runs : "And in a word to close vp these proofes of our copiousnesse, looke into our Imitations of all sorts of verses affoorded by any other Language, and you shall find that Sir Philip Sidney, Master Puttenham, Master Standihurst, and diuers more haue made vse how farre we are within compasse of a foreimagined possibility in that behalfe," *An Epistle concerning the excellencies of the English Tongue*, published in the second ed. of *Camden's Remains* (1623), p. 38.



the Hyper-critica of Edmund Bolton, whose manuscript being preserved in the archives at Oxford, was discovered and referred to by Anthony à Wood."<sup>1</sup> Sir John Harington shows an apparent ignorance of the writer's identity in 1591, when he refers to him as "that vnknowne Godfather, that this last yeare saue one set forth a booke called the Art of English Poesie,"<sup>2</sup> terming him elsewhere "the same *Ignoto*,"<sup>3</sup> and speaking slightly of "his pluralities of patterns, and parcels of his owne Poetrie, with diuerse pieces of Partheniads and hymnes in praise of the most praiseworthy." We have said that Harington's ignorance is only apparent; first, because of the whole tone of his remarks, especially the emphasized "same *Ignoto*," and secondly, because his mention of *Partheniads*, a series of poems composed by George Puttenham, "one of her majesty's gentlemen-pensioners," and presented to her as a new-year's gift in 1579, is sufficient to identify the author of these *Partheniads* with the author of *The Arte of English Poesie*.<sup>4</sup> Now, notwithstanding that only one copy of the *Partheniads* has come down to us, and that without the author's name, it is highly improbable that "her majesty's gentleman-pensioner" should have omitted to have manifested his personality to the queen in the case of a new-year's gift; hence the authorship of the *Partheniads* could have been no secret, and, being no secret, was quite within the probable knowledge of Harington, "who bowed in the crowd around the throne." Mr. Arber states that Puttenham's "name is first possibly associated in print" with *The Arte of English Poesie* "so late as 1614." Professor Morley says: "As early as 1605 *The Arte of English Poesie* was known to be Puttenham's." Professor Morley gives no reference, however.<sup>5</sup> In Bolton's Hypercritica, probably complete, and possibly published

<sup>1</sup> "A worthy gentleman, . . . called — Puttenham, one of the gentlemen pensioners to qu. Elizabeth, who according to fame was author of *The Arte of English Poetrie*, &c." *Athen. Oxon.*, i, col. 741, ed. 1813.

<sup>2</sup> *A Briefe Apologie of Poetrie*, Preface to Harington's translation of *Orlando Furioso*. Haselwood, *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, p. 122.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>4</sup> See *The Arte of English Poesie*, by Puttenham, Ed. Arber, p. 8. The *Partheniads* are printed by Haselwood in an Appendix to his first volume, pp. xix-xxxviii.

<sup>5</sup> See his *First Sketch*, p. 429.



in 1618—though no copy of such an edition is known to exist—we find the following quotation :

Q. Elizabeth's verses, those which I have seen and read, some exstant in the elegant, witty and artificial Book of the Arte of English Poetry, the work (as Fame is) of one of the Gentlemen Pensioners, Puttenham, are princely, as her Prose.<sup>1</sup>

Here we have Puttenham's name identified with the authorship of the work before us as a matter of common report. Mr. Arber's question: "Who is this high-born, high-bred, highly cultivated courtly Crichton" [of 60 years of age]? is perhaps sufficiently answered, and answered as he surmised it should be.

*The Arte of English Poesie* was probably written several years before its publication,<sup>2</sup> and attention has been justly called to the extraordinary words of the author in assigning the occasion of his work.

But in these dayes (although some learned Princes may take delight in Poets) yet vniuersally it is not so. For as well Poets as Poesie are dispised, and the name become, of honorable infamous, subject to scorn and derision, and rather a reproch than a prayse to any that vseth it: for commonly who is so studious in th' Art or shewes him selfe excellent in it, they call him in disdayne a *phantasticall*: and a light headed or phantasticall man (by conuersion) they call a Poet.<sup>3</sup>

Of such among the Nobilitie or gentry as be very well seene in many laudable sciences, and especially in making or Poesie, it is so come to passe that they haue no courage to write and if they haue, yet are they loath to be knownen of their skill. So as I know of many notable gentlemen in the Court that haue written commendably and suppressed it agayne, or els suffred it to be publist without their names to it: as if it were a discredit for a Gentleman, to seeme learned, and to shew him selfe amorous of any good Art.<sup>4</sup>

Puttenham leaves us in no doubt for whose behoof his work was intended, stating that he writes "to the pleasure of a Lady

<sup>1</sup> This tract was first reprinted by Hall in 1722, and afterward by Haselwood in his *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, pp. 221-254. The quotation above is on p. 250. Mr. Arber does not appear familiar with Haselwood's Introduction, which contains much of value. As to the *Hypercritica*, see *Dic. Nat'l Biog.*, v, p. 326. The information about Puttenham is quoted by Wood, *Athen. Oxon*, i, col. 741, ed. 1813. See also Park's note in Warton's *Hist. of English Poetry*, and some interesting biographical details of Puttenham by Mr. Collier in *Notes and Queries*, August 24th. 1861.

<sup>2</sup> Introd. Arber's Reprint, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37. This fashion, however, seems to have been too strong for the courtly author to resist himself.



and most gracious Queen, and neither to Priests nor to Prophetes or Philosophers :” “to satisfy not the school but the Court.”<sup>1</sup>

Because our chiefe purpose herein is for the learning of Ladies and young Gentlewomen or idle Courtiers, desirous to become skilful in their owne mother tongue, and for their priuate recreation to make now and then ditties of pleasure.<sup>2</sup>

With such his purpose, we are not surprised to learn elsewhere :

Euery surplusage or preposterous placing or vndue iteration or darke word, or doubtful speach are not so narrowly to be looked vpon in a large poem, nor specially in the pretie Poesies and deuises of ladies, and gentlewomen makers, whom we would not haue too precise Poets least with their shrewd wits, when they were married they might become a little too phantasticall wiues.<sup>3</sup>

In another place, let us trust more seriously, the author states: “Our intent is to make this art vulgar for all English mens use.”<sup>4</sup>

As a matter of fact, the work is rather narrowly named, and really includes far more than the art of poetry. Besides “the theory of the origin of the various forms of verse,” a description of ancient poetry, “the application of Greek and Latin numerosity” to English poetry, and a “report” of Tartarian and Persian forms of verse, “the third book explains the then theory of punctuation, has a long chapter on language, deals with figures of rhetoric as well as those of poetry proper, and has some forty pages on a seemingly foreign subject, *decorum*, by which we are to understand not only courtly manners, but also apt and felicitous expression of thought and appropriateness of dress and conduct to our condition of life.”<sup>5</sup> Mr. Arber concludes by dubbing our author “The Archbishop Trench of his age.” Of course it will be necessary for us to pass most of these subjects untouched, however interesting they might prove, and to confine the following account of *The Arte of English*

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 314 and 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 170.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> See Mr. Arber’s Introduction, *Ibid.*, p. 7.



*Poesie* to those portions of Puttenham's work in which the title does not become a misnomer. The highest praise must be bestowed alike upon the admirable arrangement of the subject-matter before us and on the vivacious style that has succeeded in making a book on such a topic as versification both popular and entertaining.

Our critic begins his first book by defining the word poet as "a maker" who "makes or construes out of his owne brain ;" affirming the poet's dignity to be "aboue all other artificers, Scientificke or Mechanicall," and denying the title to the translator, who is "to be sayd a versifier."<sup>1</sup> While acknowledging that poetry may be regarded, in a sense, the art of imitation, he emphasizes its more important function of "making," and declares: "this science, in his perfection, can not grow, but by some divine instinct."<sup>2</sup> He then argues that "there may be an Art of our English Poesie, as well as there is of the Latin and Greeke," asking pertinently: "If the Art of Poesie be but a skill appertaining to vtterance, why may not the same be with vs aswel as with them, our language being no lesse copious, pithie and significative then theirs, our conceipts the same, and our wits no lesse apt to deuise and imitate then theirs were?"<sup>3</sup> Admitting that the beauty of classic poetry may depend upon "their feete wherevpon their measures stand," "which feete we haue not," he none the less declares: "we haue in stead thereof twentie other curious points in that skill more then they euer had, by reason of our rime and tunable concords or simphonie, which they neuer obserued. Poesie therefore may be an Art in our vulgar, and that verie methodicall and commendable."<sup>4</sup>

Two chapters then follow concerning the dignity of the first poets and their powers as priests, legislators, philosophers and historians; and a third, in which it is shown that "certaine riming versicles" were common to "all the nations . . . whom

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.



the Latines and Greekes called in speciall Barbarians ;" that "natural Poesie" is therefore older than "the artificial of the Greeks and Latins," and hence "no lesse to be allowed and commended." The history of the origin of rime, in Latin during the time of the decline of the Roman Empire, is then pursued, not neglecting Ascham's "Hunnes and Gothians ;" several illustrations of Latin rimes are given, and the *Verse Lyon*, in which two verses, "turned backward," "make two other verses, but of a contrary sence," with other like "pieces of cunning" are discussed.<sup>1</sup> We are next treated to a long string of anecdotes of Homer, Cherillus, Ennius, Jehan de Mehune, Gower, Marot and others, with the estimation in which each was held by his respective sovereign, besides a list of royal authors, intended to show the former dignity of poetry, and to contrast it with the existing state of the art, in which, he tells us, the name, poet, had become a scorn and a derision.<sup>2</sup> This he attributes to ignorance and the fact that "in this iron and malicious age of ours Princes are lesse delighted in it [i. e., poetry], being ouer earnestly bent and affected to the affairs of Empire and ambition." He ends this chapter with the excellent precept, which, we have seen, he followed not by way of example :

Let none other meaner person despise learning, nor (whether it be in prose or in poesie, if they themselues be able to write, or haue written any thing well or of rare inuention) be any whit squeimish to let it be publisht vnder their names, for reason serues it, and modestie does not repugne.<sup>3</sup>

"Poesie," although "a pleasant maner of vtterance varying from the ordinarie of purpose to refresh the mynde by the eares delight," "should not be employed vpon vayne conceits or vicious or infamous," "albeit in merry matters (not vn honest) being vsed for mans solace and recreation it may be well allowed." It would be absurd to say that "Adam and Eues apernes were the gayest garments, because they were the first ;" hence it is reasonable to affirm that "Art and cunning, concurring with nature,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37, and see above.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.



antiquitie and vniversalitie, in thinges indifferent, and not euil, doe make them more laudable."

And right so our riming Poesie, being by good wittes brought to that perfection we see, is worthily to be preferred before any other maner of vtterance in prose, for such vse and to such purpose as it is ordained.<sup>1</sup>

Our author now turns to the subject matter of poetry, and enumerates the following "chief and principall" purposes :

the laud, honor and glory of the immortall Gods, . . . . the worthy gests of noble princes: the memoriall and registry of all great fortunes, the praise of virtue and reproofe of vice, the instruction of morall doctrines, the reuealing of sciences, natural and other profitable arts, the redresse of boistrous and sturdy courages by perswasion, the consolation and repose of temperate myndes, finally the common solace of mankind in all trauails and cares of his transitorie life.<sup>2</sup>

He then plunges into the classics again for several chapters, explaining "Heroick, Lyrick, and Elegiack poesie," their various origins and the authors chiefly celebrated in each, with great wealth of anecdote and allusion. In this an account of the stage is by no means forgotten, and there is much matter of the origin of classic comedies new and old, "Satyres," of the ancient theatres, *cothurni* and the *histriones*.<sup>3</sup> After a grave discussion "of historicall Poesie, (by which the famous acts of Princes and the vertuous and worthy liues of our forefathers are reported"), in which "the commonwealth of Plato and Sir Thomas More's '*Vtopia*'" are commended as "easier to be wished then to be performed," Puttenham vindicates "the litle brief Romances or historicall ditties in the English tongue" from those who "peradventure reproue and disgrace euery Romance that [it] be not written in long meeters or verses Alexandrins according to the nature and stile of large histories", saying, "they be sundry forms of poems and not all one." Then follows advice as to the celebration of "vertue in the inferior sort," for which little ditties, epigrams or epitaphs are considered fit, heroic *encomia*

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.



being reserved for "heroic personages:" the forms used by the ancients "in Poeticall rejoycings and lamentations," marriages, deaths and what not are carefully detailed. For satire, various "bitter taunts" and "pruie nips" are mentioned; for "the amorous affections and allurements," a form of "poesie, variable, inconstant, affected, curious and most witty of any others" is quaintly described; "whereof the ioyes were to be vttered in one sort, the sorrowes in an other, and by the many formes of Poesie, the many moodes and pangs of louers, throughly to be discovered."<sup>1</sup>

The first book concludes with a brief sketch of those who "haue been the most commended writers in our English Poesie" from the reign of Edward III to Puttenham's own day. In this we find our excellent critic oblivious of the rising popular drama, and giving the meed of his praise to Lord Buckhurst for tragedy, and to the "Earle of Oxford and Maister Edwardes of her majesties Chappell for comedy and enterlude." Although he mentions Sidney, Dyer and Raleigh, he seems not to have known of "the new poet," Spenser. We must remember, however, in this connection, that Puttenham was an old man, intimate in neither popular nor university circles, and that his work had probably been written some years before its publication. Moreover, when we are informed, to our amazement, that "the Queen, our sovereign Lady's delicate noble Muse, easily surmounteth all the rest that haue written before her time or since, for sence, sweetneese and subillitie . . . in any kinde of poeme Heroick or Lyricke, wherein it shall please her Majesty to employ her penne,"<sup>2</sup> we are likewise reminded that our critic was "one of her majestys gentleman-pensioners."

The second book of *The Arte of English Poesie* is concerned with "proportion poetical." Basing proportion in the "mathematicals," the author defines it as the guide of whatever "has conuenience by relation, as the visible by light, colour, and shadow: the audible by stirres, times and accents." "Poeticall proportion . . . holdeth of the muscalle because . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.



poesie is the skill to speak and write harmonically" [*i. e.*, rhythmically]. Proportion is said to consist of five points: Staff, Measure, Concord, Situation and Figure. In the discussion of staff, *i. e.*, stanza, the author confines the definition to a succession of not less than four verses or more than ten, refusing to count a distich as a staff because it "serves only for a continuance;" whilst a stanza of more than ten verses is "rather a whole dittie."<sup>1</sup> Any number between these extremes may be used, but "for the more part the staves stand rather vpon the euen number of verses than the odd." He adds that he prefers the even because "it receaveth better band."<sup>2</sup> A staff depends upon the interlacing of rimes, and should complete the sense at its conclusion, not carry it over. The discussion of proportion in measure calls forth these acute remarks as to the difference of English and classic verse:

This quantitie with them consisteth in the number of their feet: and with vs in the number of sillables, which are comprehended in euery verse, not regarding his feete, otherwise then that we allow in scanning our verse, two sillables to make one short portion . . . in euery verse . . . . .

Now because our naturall and primitiue language of the Saxon English, beares not any wordes (at least very few) of moe sillables then one (for whatsoeuer we exceede, commeth to vs by the alterations of our language growen vpon many conquests and otherwise) there could be no such obseruation of times in the sound of our wordes, and for that cause we could not haue the feete which the Greeks and Latines haue in their meetres. . . . .

This *rithmus* of theirs, is not therefore our rime, but a certaine musicall numerositie in vtterance, and not a bare number as that of the Arithmetical computation is, which therefore is not called *rithmus*, but *arithmus*. Take this away from them, I meane the running of their feete, there is nothing of curiositie among them more then with vs, nor yet so much.<sup>3</sup>

Then follows an enumeration of the sorts of measures, their character and popularity, in which not a few shrewd remarks occur. We are told that, although not in use before the time of Sir Thomas Wyatt, the Alexandrine was "with our modern writers the most usual meeter." The "cesure" is next

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Guest remarks upon this: "It was the metrical union that is found in the ballet-stave of eight, which induced Puttenham to prefer it." *Hist. of Engl. Metres*, p. 640.

<sup>3</sup> *The Arte of English Poesie*, Ed. Arber, pp. 81-83.



treated, which Puttenham confuses with the punctuation mark, dividing "cesures" into the comma, the colon and the period, the three chief pauses known to Elizabethan writers. He advises a pause in every long verse, in the middle, if the number of syllables be even; and passes some severe strictures upon "our ancient rymers, as Chaucer, Lydgate and others" who "used these cesures either very seldome or not at all or els very licentious, and many times made their meetres (they called them riding ryme) of such vnshapely wordes as would allow no convenient cesure, and therefore did let their rymes runne out at length, and neuer stayd till they came to the end."<sup>1</sup> Whence is derivable this moral:

A rymer that will be tyed to no rules at all, but range as he list, may easily vtter what he will: but such maner of Poesie is called in our vulgar, ryme dogrell, with which rebuke we will in no case our maker should be touched.<sup>2</sup>

In the next chapter we find this account of "symphonie or rime:"

In our vulgar Poesie, . . . wanting the currantnesse [*i. e.*, running quality] of the Greeke and Latine feete, in steade thereof we make in the ends of our verses a certain tunable sound: which anon after another verse reasonably distant we accord together in [the last fall or cadence: the eare taking pleasure to heare the like tune reported and to feele his returne. And for this purpose serue the *monosyllables* of our English Saxons excellently well, because they do naturally and indifferently receiue any accent, and in them if they finish the verse, resteth the shrill accent of necessitie.<sup>3</sup>

We now return to the consideration of rime under the denomination "cadence," "a certaine tunable sound which being matched with another of like sound [doth] make a concord;" the whole cadence is contained "sometime in one syllable [*i. e.*, the single or masculine rime], sometime in two [double] or in three at the most."

The accented syllable with all the rest vnder him make the cadence, and no syllable aboue. . . . The cadence which falleth vpon the last syllable

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 89.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.



of a verse is sweetest and most commendable. . . . those . . . falling vpon the *antepenultima* . . . most vnpleasant of all . . . [and] fitter for the Epigrammatist or Comicall Poet than for the Lyrick and Elegiack, which are accompted the sweeter Musickes.<sup>1</sup>

With equal insight the critic reprobates the use of perfect rimes, which make "no good accord because they are all one."

Since the chiefe grace of our vulgar Poesie consisteth in the Symphonie . . . our maker must not be too licentious in his concords, but see that they go euen, iust and melodious in the eare, and right so in the numerosity or currantnesse of the whole body of his verse, and in euery other of his proportions. For a licentious maker is in truth but a bungler and not a poet.

The good maker will not wrench his word to helpe his rime, either by falsifying his accent or by vntrue orthographie.<sup>2</sup>

Foreign terms and "words of exceeding great length," which have been "fetched from the Latine inkhorne" come in for equal censure, as do "the excess of rimes" (*e. g.*, middle rime), "which sheweth a certaine lightnesse of the matter or of the maker's head," and the use of "exceeding short meeters," as in "the reportes of Beuis of Southampton, Guy of Warwicke, etc.," "a fit of mirth for a groat," "for the recreation of the common people at Christmasse diners and brideales, and in tauerns and alehouses and such other places of base resort:" all to be banished "vtterly in our courtly maker."<sup>3</sup>

Under the term "proportion by situation," Puttenham includes the marshalling of rimes and the arrangement of verses of various lengths within the stanza. He little more than mentions the latter, although offering two or three "ocular examples;" but claims great effect from the proper marshalling of the lines of the stanza with reference to their rimes, likening these arrangements to the various musical scales of the Greeks, and discussing them in full by means of diagrams. The successive rimes of the couplet, he calls the first distance; alternate rimes, the second; "when your rime falleth upon the first and fourth verse overleaping two," the third distance; and

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 94 and 95.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.



observes that, "further distances are rare and more artificial than popular." The practice of Petrarch in his *Canzoni* and *Seizini* is given in illustration of these greater distances, and rimes "double and redoubled," "enterweaving" and "entertangled" are pursued through the "quadriene," "settaine" and "huiteine." Puttenham objects to Chaucer's practice of shutting up the staff with a distich, "which maketh a loose rime;" and then plunges at once into the consideration of proportion in figure.

Your last proportion is that of figure, so called for that it yelds an ocular representation, your meeters being by good symmetrie reduced into certaine geometricall figures, whereby the maker is restrained to keepe him within his bounds, and sheweth not onely more art, but serueth also much better for briefenesse and subtiltie of devise.<sup>1</sup>

Whereupon the author proceeds to discuss, with the same gravity which he has bestowed upon the other portions of his subject, "the lozange," "the fuzie," "the tricquet," "the pill-aster," "piramis," "rondel," etc., deriving their invention, he tells us, from "the Courts of the great princes of China and Tartarie," and not omitting to mention the figure "which they call Anacreens egge." This account of symbolic figures in verse is rendered palatable to "gentlewoman makers" and "idle courtiers" by little love tales, in which these devices figure as amulets and souvenirs; and many illustrations of the practice of such forms are given. Whether the origin of these curiosities be referable to an oriental source, to the Alexandrine rhetorician, Simmias of Rhodes, or to a far earlier classical beginning, need not concern us here. It is certain that the practice was introduced into England from Italy and France, and that the *grîphi* or *carmina figurata* were by no means uncommon in England long before the time of Puttenham. We are offered an illustration of this by no less a personage than King James himself, who in his *Essayes of a Prentise in the divine Art of Poesie* offers us *Ane Metaphoricall Inuention of a Tragedie called Phœnix*, preceded by what Professor Morley justly calls

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.



"a preface of eighteen bad lines, arranged first as shaped verse in the form of a lozenge upon a pedestal, then as a compound acrostic."<sup>1</sup> That the practice of *carmina figurata* was already recognized as a vain and paltry affectation is proved by the passage in Nashe's *Haue with you to Saffron Walden*, in which Harvey is twitted with "hauing writ verses in all kinde, as in forme of a paire of gloues, a dozen of points, a paire of spectacles, a two-hand sword, a poynado, a Colossus, a Pyramide, a Painters eazill, a market crosse, a trumpet, an anchor, a paire of pot-hookes, etc."<sup>2</sup> In the two succeeding reigns these devices became extremely popular. To say nothing of Sir John Davies' far more legitimate and "singularly clever collection of acrostics called *Astræa*, all making the name of *Elizabetha Regina*," the shaped forms themselves were practiced by such poets as Joshua Sylvester, George Herbert and George Wither,<sup>3</sup> although ridiculed by hard-headed Ben Jonson and by Dryden, in *MacFlecknoe*, long after.<sup>4</sup> Toward the close of the century the popularity of these devices declined, and we find Addison making "this false and obsolete kind of wit" the subject of a charming chat in two or three *Spectator* papers.<sup>5</sup>

Eight pages followed this on emblems and anagrams, which for some reason, by no means clear, have been cancelled in all copies of *The Arte of English Poesie* save in one, formerly the property of Ben Jonson, and now in the Grenville Collection of the British Museum.<sup>6</sup> Whether Elizabeth's censors of the press considered the general discussion of royal and other emblems contained in these pages as too frank a disclosure to the many of things to be regarded as mysterious, or

<sup>1</sup> Morley's *First Sketch*, p. 406. And see the *Essayes in the diuine Art of Poesie*, Ed. Arber, pp. 40-41, where the "Colome of 18 lines seruing for a Preface to the Tragedie ensuying" is printed.

<sup>2</sup> Works of Nashe, Ed. Grosart, iii, p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> E. g., See Herbert's *Altar*, and *Easter Wings*, *The Temple*, Ed. Pickering, pp. 17 and 35; Sylvester's *Anagrammata Regia*, etc., prefixed to his translation of Du Bartas, and other forms elsewhere; Sylvester, *Chertsey*, *Worthies Lib'y*, i, pp. 4, 15; ii, p. 321, etc.; and Wither's *Mistress of Phil'arete*, Arber's *English Garner*, iv, pp. 476-478; also, *Musarum Deliciæ*, ii, p. 295 *et passim*.

<sup>4</sup> See Anderson's *British Poets*, vi, p. 134.

<sup>5</sup> *Spectator*, Nos. 58-60. Ed. Morley, i, p. 217.

<sup>6</sup> *The Arte of English Poesie*, Ed. Arber, p. 114, note.



whether the cancellation was due to some particular passage, it would be difficult to determine at this late day. Puttenham tells a story of the finding of a device at the sack of Cartagena, in which Philip of Spain was represented on horseback upon a globe, "the horse prauncing forward with his forelegges as if he would leap of," the device inscribed with the motto: "*Non sufficit orbis.*" Perhaps, in one of the eddies of the devious courses of the Queen's policy, this story was enough to put an interdict upon the whole chapter.<sup>1</sup> These are certainly eight of the most entertaining pages of the book, and could ill be spared, trivial though their subject. That Puttenham was personally much interested in these trifles is shown by his confession, after finding two excellent anagrams upon the words, *Elissabet Anglorum Regina*: "the same letters being by me tossed and translaced fīue hundreth times, I could neuer make any other, at least of some sence and conformitie to her Maiesties estate and case."<sup>2</sup>

How far the courtiers of the days of Elizabeth were addicted to these quaint and trifling experiments it would be difficult to say. Although Puttenham is evidently earnest and interested enough in the exposition of his "geometricall figures," he is not without a twinkle in his eye when he writes that that his figures "are also fittest for the pretie amourets in Court to entertaine their servants and the time withall, their delicate wits requiring some commendable exercise to keepe them from idlenesse."<sup>3</sup> And, upon the conclusion of his discussion of the whole subject, he appends this apology:

When I wrate of these deuices, I smiled with my selfe, thinking that the readers would do so to, and many of them say, that such trifles as these might well have bene spared, considering the world is full inough of them, and that it is pitie mens heads should be fedde with such vanities as are to none edification or instruction, either of morall vertue, or otherwise behoooffull for the common wealth, to whose seruice (say they) we are all borne, and not to fill and replenish a whole world full of idle toyes. To which sort of reprehendours, being either all holy and mortified to the world, and therefore

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.



esteeming nothing that savoureth not of theology, or altogether graue and worldly, and therefore caring for nothing but matters of pollicie, and discourses of estate, or all giuen to thrift and passing for none art that is not gainefull and lucrative as the sciences of the Law, Phisicke, and marchaundise: to these I will giue none other answeare than referre them to the many trifling Poemes of Homer, Ouid, Virgill, Catullus and other notable writers of other ages.<sup>1</sup>

From "courtly trifles" our author passes to "scholasticall toyes," that is to "the grammaticall versifying of the Greeks and Latines, [to] see whether it might be reduced into our English arte or no." He heads his chapter: "How if all maner of sodaine innouations were not very scandalous, specially in the lawes of any lang[u]age or arte, the vse of the Greeke and Latine feete might be brought into our vulgar Poesie and with good grace inough."<sup>2</sup> As this subject has already been abundantly treated, we need note only one or two points necessary to the full understanding of the critic's position upon this subject. Puttenham, after especially disclaiming any intent to discredit the "meeters of our forefathers," declares that we cannot hope to copy the rules of Latin quantity, but may perhaps conveniently "allow euery word *polisyllable* one long time of necessitie, which should be where his sharpe accent falls in our owne *ydiome* most aptly and naturally. . . . The other sillables of any word where the sharpe accent fell not, to be accompted of such time and quantity as his ortographie would best beare hauing regard to himselfe, or to his next neighbor, word, bounding him on either side." The writer recognizes the existence of a secondary accent in words of more than two syllables, and suggests that "wordes *monosillables* . . . because in pronouncing them they do of necessitie retain a sharpe accent, ye may iustly allow them to be all long if they will so best serue your turne, and if they be tailed one to another, or th'one to a *dissillable* or *polisyllable* ye ought to allow them that time that best serues your purpose and pleaseth your eare most, and trueliest aunsweres the nature of the ortographie."<sup>3</sup> Puttenham criticises Standyhurst

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, Bk. ii, pp. 126-132.



severely, saying of the latter's hexameters: "A great number of them my stomacke can hardly digest for the ill shapen sound of many of his wordes *polisillable* and also his copulation of *monosyllables* supplying the quantitie of a *trissillable*."<sup>1</sup> In fact, the critic never for a moment confounds the differing principles of the two systems of versification, as did those who preceded him; but claims that the treatment of the accented English syllable, as a makeshift of the classic long syllable, and the moderate use of English monosyllables as long or short according to the exigencies of the metre, will cause these experiments to "go currant inough vpon the tongue," and allow even the dactyl "to passe well inough . . . in our vulgar meeters." He warns the poet, however, that the use of too many dactyls has the effect of making the "music too light and of no solemne grauity."<sup>2</sup>

All your other feet of three times [*i. e.*, the anapest, molossus, amphibrach, etc., etc.], I find no vse of them in our vulgar meeters nor no sweetness at all, and yet words inough to serue their proportions. . . . But because in very truth I think them but vaine and superstitious obseruations nothing at all furthering the pleasant melody of our English meeter, I leaue to speake any more of them and rather wish the continuance of our old maner of Poesie, scanning our verse by sillables rather than by feete and using most commonly the word *Iambique* and sometime the *Trochaicke* which ye shall descerne by their accents, and now and then a *dactyl* keeping precisely our symphony or rime without any other mincing measures, which an idle inuentive head could easily deuise.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Puttenham puts beyond any possible doubt his position as to this subject in the following words:

Now peradventure with us Englishmen, it be somewhat too late to admit a new inuention of feete and times that our forefathers neuer vsed, . . . and perchaunce will seeme in vs a presumptuous part to attempt . . . the limitation of times and quantities of words, with which not one, but euery eare is to be pleased and made a particular iudge; . . . therefore I intend not to proceed any further in this curiositie then to show some small subtiltie that any other hath not yet done, and not by imitation but by obseruation, nor to th' intent to haue it put in execution in our vulgar Poesie, but

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 140.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-41.



to be pleasantly scanned vpon, as are all nouelties so frivolous and ridiculous as it.<sup>1</sup>

The third part of *The Arte of English Poesie* does not fall within the scope of our present purpose, being made up of matters rhetorical, as applicable to prose as to verse. The author's fund of anecdote and his good sense are nowhere better displayed, especially in the chapter "of Language;" whilst his engaging pedantry crops out in his interminable catalogue of "figures Auricular," with their Greek labels, nice arrangement and quaint English words of comment.<sup>2</sup> It is in this part of the work, too, that we find the chapters on decorum in speech and conduct, which have been already mentioned; and the sorry specimens of Queen Elizabeth's poetical abilities.

That Puttenham's work was held in considerable estimation during his life is perhaps sufficiently shown by the several plagiarisms to which it was subjected. Meres, Cambro-Vaughn, Peacham, even Hake and Fraunce borrowed from his store of learning and anecdote without noting their obligations,<sup>3</sup> a proceeding perhaps in part justified by the strict anonymity which the courtly author sought to preserve. Later writers have formed various estimates as to the excellence of *The Arte of English Poesie*, although the majority commend the work. Haselwood says: "Puttenham was a candid but sententious critic. What his observations want in argument is made up for by the soundness of his judgment; and his conclusions, notwithstanding their brevity, are just and pertinent."<sup>4</sup> Hallam even goes so far as to affirm that "in some passages of Puttenham we find an approach to the higher province of philosophical criticism."<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, Marsh stigmatizes the work as containing

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> *E. g.* *Prozeugma*, the ringleader; *Mezozeugma*, the middle marcher; *Allegoria*, the figure of faire semblant; *Asteismus*, the merry scoff; *Charientismus*, the priue nippe; *Ironia*, the drie mock; etc., etc., etc. See appended list of "the names of your figures Auricular." *Ibid.*, p. 318.

<sup>3</sup> As to this see Haselwood, *Ancient Critical Essays*, vi, p. xi, and *Palladis Tamia*, *The Golden Grove*, *Complete Gentleman*, chap. on Poetry, *Touchstone of Wit*, *Arcadian Rhetoric*, the respective works of these borrowers.

<sup>4</sup> *Ancient Critical Essays*, i, p. xi.

<sup>5</sup> *Introd. to the Lit. of Europe*. Ed 1872, ii, p. 302.



"some learning and some observation, but no very accurate critical appreciation of the authors it attempts to characterize;" and, while allowing its value as to the formal requisites of poetry, compares it disadvantageously with a far earlier Provençal treatise on the subject.<sup>1</sup>

If, as Mr. Saintsbury says, in style "both Webbe and Puttenham fall into the rather colorless but not incorrect class," the Latinists,<sup>2</sup> there can be no doubt of their real service, however imperfectly performed, in calling attention to the subject of poetics and in showing, perhaps by some of their very defects, the essentially creative character of the age upon the threshold of which they stood. It is to be regretted that Webbe, from the ill-defined and conflicting influences upon him, and Puttenham, from the narrowness of his courtly horizon, should have exhibited to so small a degree the reflex of those mightiest poetical influences that were already beginning to make themselves felt about them.

## V.

We have reserved the consideration of Sir Philip Sidney's *An Apologie for Poetrie*, and the controversy which led to it, for this late place, because these tracts all differ materially from such works as those of Webbe and Puttenham in dealing with the justification of poetry itself, with the spirit rather than the form of the subject. Webbe and Puttenham are in a sense verse-rhetoricians. Gosson and Lodge in their controversy led Sidney on to the higher position of a critic of art; and he has unquestionably produced "the first piece of intellectual literary criticism in our language:" a work in its genuine and fervid enthusiasm, if not altogether in the soundness of its artistic principles, of a nature at least comparable to Lessing's famous *Laocoon*. In the *Apologie* we have the serious and sincere work of a man with his heart in his subject. In the words of

<sup>1</sup> Flors del gay Saber, *estier*, *dichas Las Leyes d'Amors*. See *The English Lang. and its Early Lit.*, p. 552.

<sup>2</sup> *A Hist. of Elizabethan Lit.*, p. 34.



M. Taine: "A ses yeux, s'il y a quelque art ou quelque science capable d'augmenter et de cultiver la générosité de l'homme, c'est la poésie. Tour à tour il fait comparaître devant elle le philosophe et l'historien, avec leurs prétentions qu'il raille et foule. Il combat pour elle comme un chevalier pour sa dame, et voyez de quel style héroïque et magnifique."<sup>1</sup>

There is scarcely a doubt—as the following quotation will show—that those parts of Gosson's two pamphlets, *The Schoole of Abuse*<sup>2</sup> and *An Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse*,<sup>3</sup> which attacked poetry directly, led Sidney to the composition of his *Apologie for Poetrie*.

I . . . who (I knowe not by what mischance) in these my not old yeres and idelest times, hauing slipt into the title of a Poet, am prouoked to say something vnto you in the defence of that my vnelected vocation, which if I handle with more good will then good reasons, beare with me, sith the scholler is to be pardoned that foloweth the steppes of his Maister. And yet I must say, that as I haue iust cause to make a pittiful defence of pòore Poetry, which from almost the highest estimation of learning, is fallen to be the laughingstocke of children. So haue I need to bring some more auailable proofes: sith the former is by no man barred of his deserued credite, the silly latter hath had euen the names of Philosophers vsed to the defacing of it, with the danger of ciuill war among the Muses. And first, truly to al them that professing learning inueigh against Poetry, etc.<sup>4</sup>

Gosson, with perhaps a greater degree of assurance than the circumstances warranted, dedicated *The Schoole of Abuse* to Sidney; and we learn from Spenser, "was for hys labor scorned: if at leaste it be in the goodnesse of that nature to scorne. Suche follie is it, not to regarde aforehande the inclination and qualitie of him, to whome we dedicate oure Bookes."<sup>5</sup> *The*

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise*, i, p. 300, Ed. Hachette.

<sup>2</sup> *The Schoole of Abuse, Conteining a plesaunt inuectiue against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Iesters and such like Caterpillers of a Commonwealth: setting vp the Flagge of Defiance to their mischievous exercise, and ouerthrowing their Bulwarkes, by Prophane Writers, Naturall reason and common experience: A discourse as plesaunt for gentlemen that sauour learning, as profitable for all that wyll follow vertue. By Stephan Gosson, Stud. Oxon . . . London . . . 1579.*

<sup>3</sup> *An Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse, against Poets, Pipers, Players and their Excusers*, was published in the same year, affixed to the author's *Ephemerides of Phialo*; both pamphlets are reprinted by Mr. Arber, English Reprints, No. 3.

<sup>4</sup> *An Apologie for Poetrie*. Ed. Arber, p. 20.

<sup>5</sup> Spenser to Harvey, *Two other verie commendable Letters*, Works of Harvey. Ed. Grosart, i, p. 8.



*Schoole of Abuse* appeared shortly after the publication of *Euphues, the Anatomy of Wit*, and while the rage for that remarkable book was at its height ; Gosson, therefore, writes very decidedly in the *estilo culto*, although by no means without force and merit. In the generous words which Thomas Lodge addressed to Gosson, after setting forth the latter's uncalled and violent personal attack upon him : "Loe ! courtesie can make of bad good, and of Nicanor an enemy, Nicanor a friend. Whose actions, my reprovcr, I will now fit to thee, who having slandered me without cause, I will no otherwise revenge it, but by this means, that now in publike I confesse thou hast a good pen, and if thou keepe thy Methode in discourse, and leave thy slandering without cause, there is no doubt but thou shalt bee commended for thy coppie, and praised for thy stile."<sup>1</sup>

Gosson's tract was not the first on the subject, but followed Northbrooke's *Treatise wherein Dicing, Dauncing, Vaine Playes or Enterludes, etc., . . . are reprovcd*,<sup>2</sup> as the second of the long series of attacks upon the stage, extending from Elizabeth's day to Jeremy Collier's onslaught, nearly a century and a quarter later. Into that wider question we can not, of course, enter here, as we are only concerned with those portions of these pamphlets which contain the attack upon poetry itself. It will, however, not be foreign to our purpose to note at least those pamphlets which belong to this earlier controversy ; as, in each of those extant, the nature and excellence of poetry, as well as of the drama, is involved in the discussion. Gosson's *The Schoole of Abuse* was entered at the Stationer's Hall, July 22, 1579, and probably appeared during the month of August.<sup>3</sup> It was almost immediately answered in a pamphlet entitled *Strange Newes out of Affrick*, of which there is, however, no copy extant,<sup>4</sup> and of which we have no information save that which Gosson himself has vouchsafed : this but little, and of as little value.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *An Alarum against Usurers, To the . . . Gentlemen of the Innes of Court, etc.* Sh. Soc. Pub. 1853, p. 39. Also reprinted for the Hunterian Club, No. XLIX, 1879.

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted, Sh. Soc. Pub., 1843.

<sup>3</sup> See Ed. Arber, *Chronicle*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, *Chronicle*, p. 5 and text, pp. 62-3.

<sup>5</sup> See his *Ephemerides of Phialo*, given in extract in Arber's Reprint of *The Schoole of Abuse*, pp. 62-3.



It is possible that Lodge's answer appeared in the same year, although there is nothing to prove it, as the title-page is gone in each of the two copies extant, the license for its publication having been refused, and the copies thus mutilated to prevent identification and consequent seizure. It is likely that Collier was hasty in assuming that Gosson's words: "It is tolde mee that they haue got one in London to write certaine Honest Excuses, for so they tearme it, to their dishonest abuses which I reuealed,"<sup>1</sup> must refer to Lodge; although it is to be remarked that Mr. Arber appears to accept this interpretation, an interpretation strengthened by the fact that Lodge makes no mention of *An Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse*. On the other hand, Laing calls attention to the description "one in London" as hardly applicable to Lodge, who had been to Oxford, and, in fact, was there at the same time as Gosson; and adds that "when Lodge's tract came into Gosson's hands, as something unexpected on his part, he expressly states, this was 'one whole yeere after the privy printing thereof,' and consequently several months subsequent to the publication of the *Ephemerides*."<sup>2</sup>

This answer of Lodge's has been reprinted by the Shakespeare Society under the title *A Defense of Poetry, Music and Stage-Plays*, and is interesting for its colloquial style, its extensive classical allusion and the probable fact that, in not a few particulars, it furnished the original of its far more famous successor, Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*. In November of the same year, whether before or after Lodge, Gosson appeared again in *An Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse*, an extremely short tract appended to his *Ephemerides of Phialo*, reiterating the position already taken in *The Schoole of Abuse*. Finally, Mr., afterward Sir Philip, Sidney is supposed to have written his *Apologie for Poetrie* about the year 1581. Though well known, the work long remained in manuscript, being printed for the first time in 1595. A few quotations from

<sup>1</sup> See *An Apologie for the School of Abuse*, *ibid.*, p. 73; the Introd., *ibid.*, p. 5; and Introd. to *The Schoole of Abuse*, *Sh. Soc. Pub.*, p. vii.

<sup>2</sup> Introd. *A Defense of Poetry, Music and Stage-Plays*, by Thomas Lodge, *Sh. Soc. Pub.* 1853, p. viii. Also reprinted for the Hunterian Club, No. XLVIII, 1879.



Gosson and Lodge will sufficiently indicate the nature of their controversy. And first from *The Schoole of Abuse*, in which we shall be compelled somewhat to curtail the euphuistic wealth of strange comparison.

As I cannot but commend his wisdom which in banquetting feedes most vpon that, that doth nourish best ; so must I dispraise his methode in writing, which following the course of amorous Poets, dwelleth longest in those pointes, that profite least : and like a wanton whelpe, leaueth the game, to runne riot. The scarabe flies ouer many a sweete flower, and lights in a cowshard : . . . it is the maner of swine, to forsake the fayre fieldes, and wallow in the myre : And the whole practise of Poets, eyther with fables to shew theyr abuses, or with plaine tearmes to vnfold theyr mischiefe, discover theyr shame, discredit themselves, and disperse their poyson through all the worlde. Virgill sweates in describyng his Gnat : Ouid bestirreth him to paint out his flea : the one shewes his art in the lust of Dido, the other his cunning in the incest of Myrrha, and that trumpet of Baudrie, the Craft of loue.

I must confesse that Poets are the whetstones of wit, notwithstanding that wit is dearly bought : where hony and gall are mixed, it will be hard to seuer the one from the other. . . . But . . . pul off the vizard that Poets maske in, you shall disclose their reproch, bewray their vanitie, loth their wantonnesse, lament their follie, and perceiue their sharpe sayings to be placed as Pearles in Dunghils, fresh pictures on rotten walles, chaste Matrons apparel on common Curtesans. These are the Cuppes of Circes etc . . . the balles of Hippomenes, etc. . . . the blocks of Diuel that are cast in our wayes, to cut off the rase of toward wittes. No marueyle though Plato shut them out of his Schoole, and banished them quite from his common wealth, as effeminate writers vnprofitable members and vtter enimies to vertue.<sup>1</sup>

He then details how the Romans, though "verie desirous to imitate the Greekes," were "loth to receiue their poets," and quotes the instances of Cato, Cicero in his old age, and many more to substantiate this position. After an ancient example he compares poets to cooks, saying, "the one winnes the body from labor, and conquereth the sense ; the allurement of the other drawes the mind from vertue and confoundeth wit." And again : "Cooke did neuer shewe more crafte in their iunckets to vanquish the taste . . then Poets in Theatres to wounde the conscience."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *The Schoole of Abuse*, Ed. Arber, pp. 19 and 20.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22 and 32.



He grants that poetry may exist without vice, but claims that this is rare, and to be mentioned as a matter all but incredible; in short: "hee that goes to Sea, must smell of the Ship; and that sayles into Poets [sic] wil sauour of Pitch."<sup>1</sup> Marius is instanced as a great man who never learned the Greek tongue "because he doubted the abuses of those Schooles, where Poets were euer the head Maisters;" whilst the harsh treatment of various ancient poets is dwelt on as indicating the just retribution for their cultivation of so wanton an art.

Gosson now approaches the second part of his attack and identifies poetry with piping.

Poetrie and pyping, haue alwayes bene so vnited together, that til the time of Melanippides, Pipers were Poets hyerlings.

The right vse of auncient Poetrie was too haue the notable exploytes of woorthy Captaines, the holesome counsels of good fathers, and vertuous liues of predecessors set downe in numbers, and song to the Instrument at solemne feastes, that the sound of the one might draw the hearers from kissing the cupp too often: the sense of the other put them in minde of things past, and chaulk out the way to do the like. After this maner were the Boeotians trained from rudenesse to ciuilitie.

To this end are instruments vsed in battaile, not to tickle the eare, but to teach the souldier when to strike. . . . Terpandrus with his notes, layeth the tempest, and pacifies the tumult at Lacedæmon. . . . [But] Terpandrus, when he ended the brabbles at Lacedæmon, neyther pyped Rogero nor Turkelony, but reckoning vp the commodities of friendship, and fruits of debate . . . taught them to tread a better measure. . . . If you enquire howe manie suche Poetes and Pipers wee haue in our Age, I am perswaded that euerie one of them may creepe through a ring, or daunce the wilde Morrice in a Needles eye. We haue infinite Poets, and Pipers, and suche peeuish cattel among vs in Englande, that liue by merrie begging, etc. . . . But if they that are in authoritie, and haue the sworde in their handes to cut off abuses, shoulde call an accompt to see how many Chirons, Terpandri, and Homers are heere, they might cast the summe without pen, or counters, and sit downe with Racha, to weepe for her children, because they were not.<sup>2</sup>

The third step in the argument—if such, by any license of language, it may be called—is taken with the statement: "for as Poetrie and Piping are Cosen germans: so piping, and play-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23, and *Sh. Soc. Pub.*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-27 *passim*.



ing are of great affinity, and all three chayned in linkes of abuse."<sup>1</sup> There is little more kindred to our subject except that Gosson meets the argument that poetry and the drama instruct by the presentation of lessons in morality by the remark: "if people will bee instructed (God be thanked) wee have Diuines enough to discharge that, and moe by a great many, then are well hearkened to."<sup>2</sup> At last he turns to that inevitable recourse of all objectors and reformers, the good old times when corruption was not; and draws an animated comparison between "the olde discipline of Englande" and that of his own day, in which he claims that "we haue robbed Greece of Gluttonie, Italy of wantonnesse, Spaine of pride, Fraunce of deceite, and Dutchland of quaffing,"<sup>3</sup> all of which lamentable results are attributed largely to the abuses of poetry, music and stage plays.

As we have seen, Gosson did not long remain unanswered, and besides the perished *Newes out of Affrick* he informs us himself that "the players, having in vain applied to some members of the universities to answer his *Schoole of Abuse*, had, at length, found "one in London to write certain honest excuses, to their dishonest abuses, which I reuealed."<sup>4</sup> Whether this refers to Lodge's reply or not, we shall next consider this tract, which, from the circumstance that the license for the printing of it was denied, is wanting both title and imprint in the only two copies which are known to exist.<sup>5</sup>

Lodge begins by leaving us in no doubt as to the object and occasion of his treatise:

There came to my hands lately a litle (woulde God a wittye) pamphlet, baring a fayre face as though it were the Scoole of Abuse: but being by me aduisedly wayed I fynd it the oftscome of imperfections, the writer fuller of

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> *Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse*, Ed. Arber, p. 73.

<sup>5</sup> For a full discussion of the circumstances of the writing and publication of this interesting tract, see the respective introductions to *The Schoole of Abuse*, and Lodge's pamphlet, there entitled *A Defense of Poetry, Music and Stage Plays*, both in the *Sh. Soc. Pub.* In the *Hunterian Soc. Pub.* it is called simply *A Reply to Stephan Gosson's Schoole of Abuse* (No. XLVIII); and Mr. Arber, taking Gosson's words and identifying them with the pamphlet mentioned above in Gosson's *Apologie*, etc., calls the tract *Honest Excuses*.



wordes then judgement, the matter certainly as ridiculus as serius. . . Therefore I would wish the good scholmayster to ouer looke his Abuses againe with me, so shall he see an ocean of inormities which begin in his first prinsiple in the disprayse of Poetry.

And first let me familiarly consider with this find faulte what the learned haue alwayes esteemed of Poetrie. Seneca thoughte a stoike would haue a poetick sonne, and amongst the auncientest Homer was no les accompted then *Humanus deus, etc.* . . . Lord, howe Virgils poore Gnatt pricketh him [*i. e.*, Gosson], and howe Ouids Fley byteth him! he can beare no bourde, he hath rayseed up a new sect of serius Stoikes, that can abide naught but their owne shadowe. . . Did you never reade (my ouer wittie frend) that vnder the persons of beastes many abuses were dissiphered? haue you not reason to waye? that whatsoeuer Virgil did write of his Gnatt, or Ouid of his Fley, was all covertly to declare abuse? . . . You remember not that under the person of Æneas in Virgil the practise of a dilligent captaine is discribed; vnder the shadow of byrds, beastes and trees, the follies of the world were disiphered; you know not, that the creation is signified in the image of Prometheus, etc., etc. . . The vanity of tales is wonderful, yet if we aduisedly look into them they wil seme and proue wise. . . Poets you say use coullors to couer their incon[c]iencies, and wittie sentences to burnish their baudery. . Are the gods displesant unto thee? doth Saturne in his majesty moue thee? . . doth Minerua with her weapon discomfort thee? . . In the person of Saturne our decaying yeares are signified, . . in the person of Minerua . . . our understanding. . . So that, what so they wrot, it was to this purpose, in the way of pleasure to draw men to wisdom.<sup>1</sup>

Then follows a passage that cannot but remind the reader of a similar one in Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*, in which Lodge compares the poet and the philosopher:

I think if we shal wel ouerloke the Philosophers, we shal find their judgements not half perfect. Poets, you say, fayle in their Fables, Philosophers in the verye secrets of Nature. Though Plato could wish the expulsion of Poetes from his well publiques, which he might doe with reason, yet the wisest had not all that same opinion. . . If you say that Poetes did labour about nothing, tell me (I beseech you), what wonders wroughte those your dunce Doctors in their reasons "*de ente, et non ente?*" in theyr definition of no force, and les witt? . . . Your Plato in midst of his presisnes wrought that absurdite that neuer may be read in Poets, to make a yearthly creature to beare the person of the Creator, and a corruptible substance, an incomprehensible God! etc. . . .

<sup>1</sup> *A Defense of Poetry, Music and Stage Plays*, Sh. Soc. Pub., pp. 3-6.



Seneca sayth, that the studdie of Poets, is to make children, ready to the vnderstanding of wisdom, and that our auncients did teach *artes Eleutherias, i. liberales*, because the instructed children by the instrument of knowledg in time became, *homines liberi i. Philosophye*.<sup>1</sup>

Cicero's dispraise of poets is answered in a quotation from his own oration *pro Archia Poeta*, in which the orator glorifies poetry; and this is followed up by some two quarto pages of instances sacred and profane of the high estimation in which the divine art has been held by the wise of all ages and climes. The dignity of poetry is proved on the authority of Greeks and Romans, Gentiles and Jews. Poets and philosophers, apostles and patriarchs are subpoenaed to bear testimony, and even Plato, though doubtless unwilling, is laid under requisition. "I would make a long discourse with you," says the indefatigable champion to Gosson, "of Platoes four furies, but I leave them: it pitieth me to bring a rodd of your owne making to beate you wythal." There is not much more save the refutation of the objection "pronounced by no small birde, even Aristotle himselfe: *Poetae multa mentiuntur*," with a quotation from Lactantius:

Poets are full of credit, and yet it is requisite for those that will vnderstand them to be admonished, that among them, not onely the name but the matter beareth a show of that it is not: for if, sayth he, we examine the Scriptures litterallye nothing will seem more falls, and if we waye Poetes wordes and not their meaning, our learning in them wilbe very mene:<sup>2</sup>

and an answer to the allegation of "wantonesse" by means of another quotation *De Arte poetica*.

2 I reson not that al Poets are holy, but I affirme that Poetry is a heauenly gift, a perfit gift, then which I know not greater pleasure. . . but shall one mans follye destroye a uniuersal commodity? what gift, what perfit knowledg hath ther bin emong the professors of which ther hath not bin a bad on; the Angels haue sinned in Heauen, Adam and Eue in earthly paradise, emong the holy Apostles, ungratious Judas. . . . Poets were the first raysors of cities, prescribers of good lawes, mayntayners of religion, disturbers of the wicked, aduancers of the wel disposed, inuentors of lawes, and lastly the very fot-paths to knowledge, and understanding. . . . Miserable were our state yf we wanted

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6 and 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.



those worthy volumes of Poetry : could the learned beare the losse of Homer ? or our younglyngs the writings of the Mantuan ? or you your volumes of Historyes ? Belieue me, yf you had wanted your Mysteries of Nature, and your stately stories, your booke would haue scarce been fedde wyth matter. If therefore you will deal in things of wisdome, correct the abuse, honor the science, renewe your schoole.<sup>1</sup>

Gosson's subsequent pamphlet, *An Apologie of the Schoole of Abuse*, need not detain us long. It could scarcely have been written with Lodge's answer before him, and, indeed, was probably written simply to reaffirm his position, as Mr. Arber suggests, upon hearing that some one was at work on an answer to *The Schoole of Abuse*. Except for a single passage defining his position, Gosson does little more than amplify his former paper and add a long list of the crimes and misdemeanors of the personages of ancient mythology. It must be confessed that if Gosson meant no more by *The Schoole of Abuse* than the following, he was needlessly refuted ; but from the general tone of the first pamphlet, we may feel sure that he had been more or less forced to this qualification of his position, which, after all, occupies but little space as compared with that devoted to a reiteration of his former violent attacks :

My Schoole of Abuse, hath met with some enemies, bicause it correcteth vnthrifty schollers. . . . They that are greeued are Poets, Pipers, and Players : the first think that I banishe poetrie, wherein they dreame : the second iudge, that I condemne Musique, wherein they dote : the last proclaime, that I forbid recreation to man, wherein you may see they are starke blinde. He that readeth with aduise the booke which I wrote, shall perceiue that I touche but the abuses of all these. When we accuse a Phisition for killing his patient, we finde no faulte with the Arte it selfe, but with him that hath abused the same.<sup>2</sup>

It would be little short of an impertinence to enter into a detailed epitome of so well known a tract as Sidney's ; and we shall, therefore, confine our attention to a brief consideration of some of the opinions held by this ablest critic of his day ; and if possible, get at some estimate of the real value of his work.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 14 and 16.

<sup>2</sup> *An Apologie of the School of Abuse*. Ed. Arber, p. 65.



Sidney did not undertake to enter into anything like direct controversy with so mean a man as Gosson; but, choosing his own ground, rode his tilt for the calm-eyed goddess, Poesie, a valiant champion against all comers. As Mr. Arber has stated, "the ultimate point at issue between Sidney and Gosson seems to have been whether uncleanness, falsity and effeminacy were separable or inseparable from poetry."<sup>1</sup> In such an issue, it was easy for Sidney to bear down all before him by the strength of his learning and the heat of his enthusiasm, retorting Gosson's imputations upon him, and affirming not only the guiltlessness of poetry, but her essential superiority to all other arts and the sciences. To the objection that a man might better spend his time than in the reading of poetry, comes the pertinent reply: "It should follow very unwillingly that good is not good, because better is better;"<sup>2</sup> to the plea that poetry "abuseth mens wit trayning it to wanton sinfulness and lustfull loue," the apothegm: let us "not say that Poetrie abuseth mans wit but that mans wit abuseth poetrie;"<sup>3</sup> whilst the proposition that poetry has softened men's manners and rendered them vicious, is shown by Sidney to apply equally well, as "the doctrine of ignorance," to all learning. Plato's banishment of poetry from his Republic, especially on account of the falsity and wantonness of it, was made by Gosson the rallying point of his attack;<sup>4</sup> and it is consequently against this position that Sidney directs his chief onslaught. He does not hesitate to urge a "like cauillation against Philosophers," and asks pertinently: "Out of what Common-wealth Plato did banish them [*i. e.*, the poets]? insooth, thence where he himselfe alloweth communitie of women: so as belike, this banishment grewe not for effeminate wantonnes, sith little should poetical Sonnets be hurtfull, when a man might haue what woman he listed."<sup>5</sup> For this and other reasons he concludes that Plato banished the abuse of poetry, not poetry itself.

<sup>1</sup> See Introduction to *An Apologie for Poetry*. Ed. Arber, p. 8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 53.

<sup>4</sup> *The Schoole of Abuse*. Sh. Soc. Publ., p. 10.

<sup>5</sup> *An Apologie for Poetrie*. Ed. Arber, p. 57.



On the broader ground of general inquiry, Sidney's work offers several matters for consideration. First, his conception of the meaning of the term poetry is that broad, if somewhat loose, one that goes to its inner artistic spirit and considers the form a mere accident not an essential of that spirit. Perhaps even more, as Mr. Arber says, Sidney would probably have called Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Fénelon's *Telemachus*, and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* poems;<sup>1</sup> in a word, Sidney is an ardent devotee of what Mr. Saintsbury calls "the pestilent heresy of prose-poetry:" a heresy to which not a few of the greatest names in English poetry and criticism have been given. Let us listen to Sidney's own words:

The greatest part of Poets haue apparelled their poetically inuentions in that numbrous kinde of writing which is called verse: indeed but apparelled, verse being but an ornament and no cause to Poetry: sith there haue beene many most excellent Poets, that neuer versified, and now swarme many versifiers that need neuer aunswer to the name of Poets. . . . It is not riming and versing that maketh a Poet, no more then a long gowne maketh an Aduocate: who though he pleaded in armor should be an Aduocate and no Souldier. But it is that fayning notable images of vertues, vices, or what els, with that delightfull teaching which must be the right describing note to know a Poet by: although indeed the Senate of Poets hath chosen verse as their fittest rayment, meaning, as in matter they passed all in all, so in maner to goe beyond them: not speaking (table talk fashion or like men in a dreame), words as they chanceably fall from the mouth, but peyzing each sillable of each worde by iust proportion according to the dignitie of the subiect.<sup>2</sup>

In the absence of any word to take its place, it is perhaps to be regretted that "the science of definition" has "progressed" to the extent of limiting the word poet to "an imaginator in verse." As Mr. Arber states, quoting Sidney, we certainly have need of a "a generic term embracing . . . all who 'imitate to teach and delight, and to imitate, borrow nothing of what is, hath been, or shall be: but range onely rayned with learned discretion, into the divine consideration of what may be or should be.'"<sup>3</sup> It has been said that the greatest error into

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Introd., p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> *An Apologie for Poetrie*, Ed. Arber, pp. 28 and 29.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10 and 28.



which this unorthodox definition of poetry led Sidney, was a want of appreciation of the real nature and difficulty of prose. Without doubt the style of the *Arcadia*, considered as prose, is open to much cavil. On the other hand, it must be admitted that the *Arcadia* is not inconsistent with Sidney's theories, and that its subject-matter lends itself not unnaturally to the florid and ornate treatment which it has received; whilst the purer style of the *Apologie for Poetrie* proves that Sidney was quite capable of making the necessary distinction between the poetical and the prose style when the nature of his subject demanded it. While granting all that has been said of Sidney's guilt in "the special Elizabethan sin of convoluting and entangling his phrases" and "spoiling the syntax of sentence and paragraph,"<sup>1</sup> it must be acknowledged that the *Apologie for Poetrie* is singularly direct in the conveyance of the thought intended, and that it abounds in passages of great beauty and of genuine eloquence. An absolute line between poetry and prose can never be drawn for the simple reason that the poetical minds of all literatures have ever, in their practice, affirmed the right of the artist to perfect freedom in the choice of his medium. Perhaps it is just this impossibility of hitting upon a real criterion for this distinction that causes the spurious one, an accident of form, to be so constantly and so strenuously urged.

Another point, often adverted to, and one in which Sidney and Gosson agree with the bulk of their learned contemporaries, is their discontent with the existing state of English poetry. Nothing but the most careless confusion of dates can interpret this into a want of appreciation. *An Apologie for Poetrie* was written at least a year before Shakespeare's improvident marriage, and while he was engaged in that mysterious apprenticeship, in which he learned to excell all men in all the arts. And although a confident E. K. had already prematurely heralded "the new poet," Spenser had only begun to write *The Faërie Queene*, even the first book of which was destined to continue unpublished for nearly a decade; whilst Gascoigne, recently

<sup>1</sup> See Saintsbury's *A History of Elizabethan Literature*, p. 42.



dead, was acknowledged "the chiefe of our late rimers." When all this is remembered, it will be difficult to find fault with Sidney, who, after commending Chaucer, *The Mirror for Magistrates*, Surrey's lyrics and *The Shepherd's Calendar*, adds:

Besides these, doe I not remember to haue seene but fewe, (to speake boldely) printed, that haue poetically sinnewes in them: for prooffe whereof, let but most of the verses bee put in Prose, and then aske the meaning: it will be found, that one verse did but beget another, without ordering at the first, what should be at the last: which becomes a confused masse of words, with a tingling sound of ryme, barely accompanied with reason.<sup>1</sup>

Closely allied to his estimate of contemporary English poetry is Sidney's conservative view of the stage. "By his vindication of the unities, and his denunciation of the mixture of tragedy and comedy, he was, (of course without knowing it), laying down exactly the two principles, a fortunate abjuration and scouting whereof gave us the greatest possession in mass and variety of merit that any literature possesses."<sup>2</sup> However, Sidney's view of the stage was altogether justified by the yet unformed condition of the drama in the year 1580. Six or seven years were yet to pass before the "mighty line" of *Tamburlaine* was to sound a new era for English drama: and neither Lyly, Kyd, Peele or Greene had as yet written any drama of note. The plays which Sidney had before him were such as Gascoigne's and other's *quasi* translations, Preston's extraordinary and hybrid *Cambises*; *Tancred and Gismund*, an attempt to combine classic and romantic requirements; the first *Romeo and Juliet*, and Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra*, the preface to the last of which, by the way, no doubt furnished Sidney with the original of his famous passage upon the absurdities of the unities of time and space. This we must be pardoned for quoting in part, for the sake of comparison:

. . . Comes out a hideous Monster, with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders, are bound to take it (the scene) for a Caue. . . . Ordinary it is that two young Princes fall in loue. After many trauerces, she is

<sup>1</sup> *An Apologie for Poetrie*, Ed. Arber, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup> *A History of Elizabethan Literature*, p. 41.



got with childe, deliuered of a faire boy, he is lost, groweth a man, falls in loue, and is ready to get another childe, and all this in two hours space.<sup>1</sup>

The following passage is from the preface of Whetstone's play, which was printed in 1578, and from which Shakespeare took the plot of *Measure for Measure*.<sup>2</sup>

The Englishman [*i. e.*, as a playwright] in this qualitie, is most vaine, indiscreete, and out of order : he first grounds his worke on impossibilities : then in three howers ronnes he throwe the world : marryes, gets children, makes children men, men to conquer Kingdomes, murder monsters, and bringeth Gods from Heauen, and fetcheth diuels from Hel.<sup>3</sup>

It was not unnatural that, between the absurdities of *Cam-bises* and the consummate architectural form of Greek tragedy, Sidney should have preferred the latter. Romanticism, which has not surpassed the classics on their own ground, but has rivalled them in a new and legitimate form of art dependent upon its own, instead of upon ancient traditions, had not yet justified itself in England by the masterpieces soon to follow ; and it was only in the master's hand that a realistic mingling of smiles and tears could hope for triumphant justification.

Towards the end of the treatise the author consciously leaves his subject to proffer some remarks upon the euphuistic style so popular at the time. While making no personal attack, his allusions are sufficiently obvious, and were doubtless prompted directly by such works as Gosson's and other minor euphuists' with which the book markets were teeming.

So is that honey-flowing Matron Eloquence, apparelled, or rather disguised, in a Curtizan-like painted affectation : one time with so farre sette words, they may seeme Monsters: but must seeme straungers to any poore English man. Another tyme, with coursing of a letter, as if they were bound

<sup>1</sup> *An Apologie for Poetrie*, Ed. Arber, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> See Ward's *English Dramatic Literature*, i, p. 118. *Promos and Cassandra* is reprinted in *Six Old Plays on which Sh. founded his Measure for Measure*, Ed. Nichols, 1779, i, pp. 1-108, and Hazlitt's *Sh. Library*, where, however, only Whetstone's subsequent prose version of his story is given.

<sup>3</sup> *To his worshipfull Friende and Kinsman William Fleetwoode Esquier, Recorder of London*, preface to Whetstone's *Promos and Cassandra, Six Old Plays, etc.*, i, p. 4. See the well-known passage of Nashe in which he complains that "Seneca let bloud line by line and page by page must needes die to our stage." Preface to Greene's *Menaphon*, Works of Greene, Ed. Grosart, vi, p. 20.



to followe the method of a dictionary: an other tyme, with figures and flowers, extreamlie winter-starued. . . . .

For nowe they cast Sugar and Spice, vpon euery dish that is serued to the table; like those Indians, not content to weare eare-rings at the fit and naturall place of the eares, but they will thrust Iewels through their nose, and lippes, because they will be sure to be fine. . . . .

In certaine printed discourses, I think all Herbarists, all stories of Beasts, Foules, and Fishes, are rifled vp, that they come in multitudes to wait vpon any of our conceits: which is as absurd a surfet to the eares, as is possible: for the force of a similitude, not being to proue anything to a contrary Disputer, but onely to explaine to a willing hearer, when that is done, the rest is most tedious pratling.<sup>1</sup>

This it is that largely justifies the claim often made for Sidney, that he first reformed the language from the absurdities of the *estilo culto*. While far from prepared, in view of the *Arcadia*, to grant him so high a degree of praise, there can be little doubt that Sidney, while often avoiding the *mot propre* after the manner of the fine gentleman of his day, is rarely a grave offender in the more vulgar euphuistic mannerisms.

The author's few remarks upon versifying need detain us but a moment. He recognizes the difference between ancient and modern versification in these words:

Now, of versifying there are two sorts, . . . the Auncient marked the quantitie of each silable, and according to that framed his verse: the Moderne, obseruing onely number, (with some regarde of the accent,) the chiefe life of it, standeth in that lyke sounding of the words, which wee call Ryme. Whether of these be the most excellent, would beare many speeches.<sup>2</sup>

He does not discuss the matter further; but acknowledging that "Ryme striketh a certaine musick to the eare," claims that English is fitted above all other modern languages for the cultivation of both forms of versification, especially because of the variety of its placing of the accent. To this is added the advantage that, in English, unlike in Italian and French, we "neuer almost fayle" of the cæsura or breathing place, and enjoy unusual advantages in an ability to form double, and even treble, as well as single rimes.

<sup>1</sup> *An Apologie for Poetrie*, Ed. Arber, pp. 68-9.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.



The chief merit of *An Apologie for Poetry*, consists in its lofty ideality and affirmation of the true function of poetry. We have here no petty dallying with mere toys of wit, to fill the vacant time of idle courtiers and gentlewomen; but the serious assignment to poetry of that concrete representation of man's ideal which the late Mr. Matthew Arnold called, in the highest sense of that term, "a criticism of life." There is nothing but his own words that can show the loftiness of this conception of poetry and the "Sidneian sweetness, purity and grace of thought."

There is no Arte deliuered to mankinde, that hath not the workes of Nature for his principall object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend, as they become Actors and Players as it were, of what Nature will haue set foorth. So doth the Astronomer looke vpon the starres, and by that he seeth, setteth downe what order Nature hath taken therein. Soe doe the Geometrician, and Arithmetician in their diuerse sorts of quantities, . . . the Morall Philosopher standeth vpon the naturall vertues, vices, and passions of man: . . . the Phisition waigheth the nature of mans bodie, and the nature of things helpful, or hurtfull vnto it. And the Metaphisick, though it be in the seconde and abstract notions, and therefore be counted supernaturall: yet doth he indeede builde vpon the depth of Nature: only the Poet, disdayning to be tied to any such subiection, lifted vp with the vigor of his owne inuention, dooth growe in effect, another Nature, in making things either better than Nature bringeth forth, or quite a newe formes such as neuer were in nature: . . . so as hee goeth hand in hand with Nature, not inclosed within the narrow warrant of her guifts, but freely ranging only within the Zodiack of his owne wit.

Nature neuer set forth the earth in so rich tapistry, as diuers Poets haue done, neither with plesant riuers, fruitful trees, sweet smelling flowers: nor whatsoeuer els may make the too much loued earth more louely. Her world is brasen, the Poets only deliuer a golden.<sup>1</sup> . . .

Neyther let it be deemed too fawcie a comparison to ballance the highest poynt of mans wit with the efficacies of Nature: but rather giue right honor to the heauenly Maker of that maker: who hauing made man in his owne likenes, set him beyond and ouer all the workes of that second nature, which in nothing hee sheweth so much as in Poetrie: when with the force of a diuine breath, he bringeth things forth far surpassing her dooings, with no small argument to the incredulous of that first accursed fall of Adam: sith our erected wit, maketh us know what perfection is, and yet our infected will, keepeth vs from reaching vnto it.<sup>2</sup> . . .

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, Ed. Arber, p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.



Now therein of all Sciences . . . is our Poet the Monarch. For hee dooth not only show the way, but giueth so sweete a prospect into the way, as will intice any man to enter into it. Nay he dooth as if your iourney should lie through a fayre Vineyard, at the first giue you a cluster of Grapes: that full of that taste, you may long to passe further. He beginneth not with obscure definitions, which must blur the margent with interpretations, and load the memory with doubtfulnesse: but hee commeth to you with words sent in delightfull proportion, either accompanied with or prepared for the well inchaunting skill of Musicke: and with a tale forsooth he commeth vnto you: with a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner. And pretending no more, doth intende the winning of the mind from wickednesse to vertue.<sup>1</sup>

We may truly say that we have here in Sidney's own words applied to King David: "the peerlesse poet . . . a passionate loue of that vnspeakable and euerlasting beautie to be seene by the eyes of the minde, only cleered by fayth."

In the year 1591 Sir John Harington, Knt., published the first edition of his translation of *Orlando Furioso* in English Heroic Verse, to which he prefixed *A Brieve Apologie of Poetrie and of the Author and Translator of this Poem*.<sup>2</sup> Harington was evidently well acquainted with Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*, though still in manuscript, and refers to it in terms of high commendation. His own *Apologie*, not unlike that of Sidney, is, in part, a defence of poetry from the old charges of Plato, Aristotle and others, the first of whom, he says, "kept still that principall part of poetrie, which is fiction and imagination;" the second, although rejecting this, retaining "still a kind of obscuritie," which Harington seems to have thought a necessary concomitant of poetry. He quotes Cornelius Agrippa, to combat his "bitter inuectiue against Poets and Poesie:" that the latter is a nurse of lies, a pleaser of fools, "a breeder of dangerous errors" and an "enticer to wantones." Harington assigns to poetry her historical position as "the verie first nurse and grand mother of all learning," and speaks very slightly of "the manie newe named figures" of Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie*. As in the following:

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40, and see Mr. Arber's Introd., *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Reprinted in Haselwood's *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, pp. 118-146.



For though the poore gentleman laboreth greatly to proue, or rather to make Poetrie an Art, and reciteth as you may see in the plurall number, some puralities of patterns, and parcels of his owne Poetrie, with diuerse pieces of Partheniads and hymnes in praise of the most praiseworthy: yet whatsoeuer he would prove by all these, sure in my poore opinion he doth proue nothing more plainly, then that which M. Sidney and all the learned sort that haue written of it, do pronounce, namely that it is a gift and not an art, I say he proueth it, because making himselfe and manie others so cunning in the art, yet he sheweth himself so slender a gift in it.<sup>1</sup>

Harington's defenses of poetrie against the "inuectiues" of Agrippa, although extremely entertaining, need not detain us long. The following will sufficiently exhibit their purport.

And first for lying, I might if I list excuse it by the rule of *Poetica licentia*, and claime a priuiledge giuen to Poetrie, whose art is but an imitation (as Aristotle calleth it) and therefore are allowed to faine what they list. . . For in my opinion they are said properly to lye that affirme that to be true that is false: . . but Poets neuer affirming any for true but presenting them to us as fables and imitations, cannot lie though they would.<sup>2</sup> . . . .

Now the second obiection is pleasing of fools: I haue already showed how it [poetry] displeaseth not wise men: . . wherefore I confesse that it pleaseth fooles and so pleaseth them, that if they marke it and obserue it well, it will in time make them wise, for in verse is both goodnesse and sweetnesse, Rubarb and Sugarcandie, the pleasaunt and the profitable, etc., etc.<sup>3</sup>

Quite as amusing are some of his other pleas: that the deep mysteries of learning need the concealments of verse—a plea practically exemplified by at least one great name in our own day; that the precepts of "husbandrie" are better remembered in verse than in prose, and that poetry is "one kinde of meate . . . to feed diuerse tastes."

For the weaker capacities will feede themselves with the pleasantnes of the historie and sweetnes of the verse, some that haue stronger stomackes will as it were take a further taste of the Morall sence, a third sort more high conceited then they, will digest the Allegorie.<sup>4</sup>

With deeper insight, he considers the special grace of verse to consist in "the forcible manner of phrase, in which, if it

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 126 and 132-133.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129 *et passim*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.



be well made, it farre excelleth loose speech or prose ;” and notes “the pleasure and sweetness to the ear, which makes the discourse pleausant vnto vs often time when the matter it selfe is harsh and vnacceptable.”<sup>1</sup>

Harington’s preface is not much more than an echo of Sidney’s abler work ; and whether directly inspired by a reading of *An Apologie for Poetrie* (as is probable) or not, shows the action of a mind of far less breadth working in the same direction. For many years, save for the publication of this work of Sidney’s, already widely known in manuscript, nothing partaking of the nature of poetical or verse criticism appeared, although the classical experiments, as we have seen, continued to be a favorite pastime of the obscurer, gentleman poets, and earned for one of them Ben Jonson’s blunt remark to Drummond “that Abram Francis in his English Hexameters was a Foole.”<sup>2</sup> This Abraham or Abram Fraunce had previously published a critical treatise, a mixture of prose and verse, under the quaint title of *The Arcadian Rhetoricke, or the Precepts of Rhetoricke made plain by example, Greeke, Latyne, Englishe, Italyan and Spanishe*, in which not a few of the prevailing principles of the subject of poetics are reiterated with little originality.<sup>3</sup>

## VI.

We now come to the last Elizabethan attempt to break away from that system of versification which had been justifying itself throughout the reign in the successive achievements of the most brilliant assemblage of English poets: *Observations in the Art of English Poesie, by Thomas Campion. Wherein it is demonstratively prooued and by example confirmed that the English toong will receiue eight seuerall kinds of numbers, proper to it selfe, which are all in this booke set forth, and were neuer before this time by any man attempted, etc.*, 1602. Of this exceedingly rare little treatise, Haselwood says: “There was never

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> *Notes of Ben Jonson’s Conversations with Drummond.* Sh. Soc. Pub., 1842, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> See Drake, *Sh. and his Times*, i, 464 ; Warton, *Hist. of Engl. Poetry*, Ed. 1840, iii, p. 329.



more than one edition; and if its unusual size is considered, a small square twelves, containing only twenty-five leaves, with the whole theory refuted early after publication, it can no longer appear singular that only a few copies should be preserved in the cabinets of the curious."<sup>1</sup> It is notable that the *Observations* are dedicated to no less a personage than Lord Buckhurst, Lord High Treasurer of England, whose own early attempt at unrimed dramatic verse may possibly point to a sympathy with this theory. In this dedication, the author says:

Poesy in all kind of speaking is the chiefe beginner and maintayner of eloquence, not only helping the eare with the acquaintance of sweet numbers, but also raying the minde to a more high and lofty conceite. For this end haue I studyed to induce a true forme of versefying into our language: for the vulgar and vnartificiall custome of riming hath I know deter'd many excellent wits from the exercise of English Poesy.<sup>2</sup>

Campion was a musician of considerable note in his day, and his *Observations* show his training in the sister art. In his first "chapter" the author discourses of numbers, saying "when we speake of a Poeme written in number, we consider not only the distinct number of sillables, but also their value, which is contained in the length or shortnes of their sound. As in Musick we do not say a strain of so many notes, but so many sem'-briefs; . . . so in verse the numeration of the sillables is not so much to be obserued, as their waite and due proportion."<sup>3</sup> He then compares rime to alliteration, continuing:

The eare is a rational sence and a chiefe iudge of proportion, but in our kind of riming what proportion is there kept, where there remaines such a confused inequalitie of sillables? *Iambick* and *Trochaick* feete, which are opposed by nature, are by all Rimers confounded: nay oftentimes they place instead of an *Iambick* the foot *Pyrrychius*, consisting of two short sillables, curtalling their verse, which they supply in reading with a ridiculous and vnapt drawing of their speech? . . . But there is yet another fault in Rime altogether intollerable, which is, that it inforceth a man oftentimes to abiure his matter and extend a short conceit beyond all bounds of arte.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, p. xi.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 161.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165-6.



In his third "chapter," which is "of our English numbers in generall," Campion shows himself no rabid hexametrist by the following confession :

The Heroicall verse that is distinguisht by the Dactile, hath bene oftentimes attempted in our English toong, but with passing pitiful successe : and no wonder, seeing that it is an attempt altogether against the nature of our language. For both the concurse of our monasillables make our verse vnapt to slide, and also if we examine our polysillables, we shall finde few of them by reason of their heauinesse, willing to serue in place of a Dactile.<sup>1</sup>

In consequence of this, Campion considers that the new versification, to accord with the nature of our English syllables, should consist of iambic and trochaic measures alone ; but, "hauing these two principall kinds of verses, we may easily out of them deriue other formes."<sup>2</sup>

In the next "chapter" our author has hit upon the interesting principle of pauses ; reasoning as did the late Mr. Lanier, from the phenomena of rests in music to pauses in verse.<sup>3</sup> Campion is here in some little confusion, apparently confounding the rhetorical with the compensating pause. It may be stated in passing that, as Daniel pointed out, Campion's "licentiate Iambick," to judge by his examples, is fairly good average blank verse, in no wise differing, except in excellence, from what he might have heard any afternoon in the new plays of Shakespeare and others at the Globe, the Swan or the Rose. However, Campion makes several observations upon this verse which are worthy of note. He observes that "the naturall breathing place of our English Iambic verse is in the last sillable of the second foote," but that the rule is not invariable ; that a tribrach may take the place of an iambus giving these illustrations of the redundant syllable :

Some trade in *Barbary*, some in Turkey trade ;

Men that do fall to *misery*, quickly fall ;

Renowned in eu'ry art there liues not *any*.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 168.

<sup>3</sup> See *Science of English Verse*, p. 32. The general recognition of this important principle by the best recent authorities need call for no remark here. See on this topic an interesting paper in the *Transactions of the American Philological Society*, 1885, entitled *Quantity in English Verse*.

<sup>4</sup> *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, pp. 170-71.



The redundant syllable in the last example forms the familiar double ending. Again, he says: "I see no reason why the English Iambick in his first place, may not as well borrow a foot of the Trochy," *e. g.*:

As the faire sonne the lightsome heau'n adorns ;<sup>1</sup>

*in fin!* in which case he insists that the second foot must be a spondee, dactyl or tribrach. Soon follows the perfectly reasonable but astonishing utterance: "[the Iambick verse in like manner being yet made a little more licentiate, that it may thereby the neerer imitate our common talke, will excellently serue for Comedies."<sup>2</sup> Where could the musical Doctor have kept his ears all this time? to propose this measure thus innocently for the drama, when the English stage had been ringing with his "licentiate iambics" for more than two decades!

The author then treats successively what he calls the "Iambic Dimeter," *e. g.*:

Raving warre begot  
In the thirstye sands  
Of the Lybyan Iles  
Wasts our emptye fields, etc.<sup>3</sup>

This, for a reason not altogether clear, he terms "our most naturall and auncient English verse," recommends it for the Chorus in tragedy, and adds, "it answers our warlick forme of march in similitude of number." Then follow "the English Trochaick verse," which is "of fve feete," "the spirit of which most of all delights in Epigrams;" "the Elegeick," the first verse of which is "a meere licentiate Iambic, the second . . . framed of two united Dimeters;" and "the Saphick," and two compound stanzas,<sup>4</sup> fit for ditties and odes. He ends his enumeration with an account of "Anacreontick verse," which he puts last because too "licentiate" for a higher place: "yet is it passing gracefull in our English toong, and will excellently fit the subject of a Madrigall, or any other lofty or tragicall matter."<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 172.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 173.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 173-175; and see Guest's *History of English Rhythms*, p. 557.

<sup>5</sup> *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, p. 184.



Campion gives abundant illustrations of his measures, and they enjoy the usual success of such curiosities. His blank verse is creditable, and we shall certainly not disagree with Dr. Guest in his admiration for the pretty song beginning :

Rose-cheekt Laura, come !  
Sing thou smoothly with thy beawties  
Silent musick, either other  
Sweetly gracing, etc.<sup>1</sup>

We must, however, congratulate ourselves, on the whole, that Campion's tuneful ear prevented these interesting theories from stilling the voice of one of the sweetest of the minor lyric poets of Elizabeth's reign. Having passed the Scylla of Campion's classical imitations not without some damage, let us beware the Charybdis of the quantity of English syllables with which he closes his *Observations*.

As Dr. Guest remarks, in this treatise, "amid much vague and inconsequential reasoning, we sometimes catch a glimpse of the real principles on which English verse depends, the result of his [Campion's] criticism was the recommendation of certain metres, which he thought especially suited to certain subjects, and at the same time sufficiently rhythmical to support themselves without the aid of rime."<sup>2</sup> Mr. Haselwood is probably quite correct in his surmise that Campion was "early convinced of the impracticability of a plan to force English verse to stalk in Roman measures." It is certain that "he did not attempt to support the *Observations* by any reply to his antagonist [Daniel], or venture to publish any specimens in addition to those first produced as an assistance for explaining the system."<sup>3</sup>

Of course it was not to be expected that an article so revolutionary should go unanswered. This was not an age like that of the Areopagus, in which the poets were still groping their way in the doubtful greyness of the early morning. The sun had risen with a glory unprecedented, and in the works of Spen-

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182.

<sup>2</sup> Guest, *Hist. of Engl. Rhythms*, p. 556.

<sup>3</sup> *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, p. xiv.



ser, Marlowe and Shakespeare, and the host of lesser names, English poetry and English rime had been abundantly vindicated. Campion's objection to rime was, however, not altogether foolish; but this objection had long been answered, at least as far as the drama was concerned, by the unexampled development of blank verse as its medium; and no mere restriction of the Protean variety of Elizabethan verse-forms to the poverty of a half dozen classic schemes could possibly answer the magnitude of the real question which Campion raised. Even to-day there are many who feel that any further development of the *technique* of verse must come in a direction which at least claims some possibility of producing effects not altogether hackneyed. The recurrence of certain inevitable rimes often becomes inexpressibly tiresome to the reader of English poetry; and without doubt, as Campion says, cannot but hamper the freedom of thought in the little, if not in the great.

Campion's antagonist was no less a man than Samuel Daniel, the poet laureate, who replied in the same year in *A Defence of Ryme against a Pamphlet entituled Obseruations in the Art of English Poesie. Wherein is demonstratiuely prooued that Ryme is the fittest harmonie of wordes that comports with our Language. By Sa: D.* The first edition was in folio, 1602; the second included *A Defence, etc.*, with *A Panegyricke Congratulatorie to the King and Certain Epistles*, 1603.<sup>1</sup> "The fate of this article has been the reverse of the preceding. While that was read to be forgotten, this answer to it has proved one of the few pieces of Elizabethan criticism from time to time reprinted, and has always accompanied the poems of the author."<sup>2</sup>

Daniel prefaces his remarks with expressions of wonder that "the general custome and vse of ryme" had not "as if from a grant of nature" come to be altogether out of the way of contradiction;" pays a high tribute to "the commendable Rymes, the faire parts, and good reputation" of Campion; and says that there would be little need of a defence had the attack been a

<sup>1</sup> Reprinted in Haselwood's *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, pp. 191-219, and in the various editions of Daniel's works.

<sup>2</sup> *Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, Introd., p. xv.



mere sally "made out of the quarter of our set Knowledges" working "no other effect than [to] make a Brauado." "We could well haue allowed of his numbers, had he not disgraced our Ryme, which both custom and nature doth most powerfully defend; custom that is before all law, nature that is above all art." But Campion had arraigned "every Rymer in this uniuersall Iland," and the author, therefore, warns him that he must "expect the return of a like measure of blame." Daniel then proceeds at once with the matter in hand.

Euery language hath her proper number or measure fitted to use and delight, which custome entertaining by allowance of the eare, doth indenize, and make naturall. All verse is but a frame of words confinde within certaine measure; differing from the ordinarie speach, and introduced, the better to express mens conceits, both for delight and memorie. Which frame of words, consisting of *Rithmus* or *Metrum*, number or measure, are disposed into diuers fashions, according to the humor of the composer, and the set of the time.<sup>1</sup> . . .

They [*i. e.*, words] fall as naturally already in our language as euer arte can make them, being such as the eare of it selfe doth marshall in their proper roomes. . . .

And for our Ryme (which is an excellencie added to this worke of measure, and a harmonie farre happier than any proportion antiquitie could euer shew vs) doth adde more grace, and hath more of delight than euer bare numbers, howsoever they can be forced to runne in our slow language can possibly yeeld.

As Greeke and Latine verse consists of the number and quantitie of syllables, so doth the English verse of measure and accent. And though it doth not strictly obserue long and short syllables, yet it most religiously respects the accent: and as the short and the long make number, so the accute and grave accent yeeld harmonie: and harmonie is likewise number; so that the English verse then hath number, measure and harmonie in the best proportion of musike.<sup>2</sup>

Daniel then argues the excellence of rime from the universal practice of it and from its existence in many tongues as a factor in verse; inferring that the "Latin numbers, notwithstanding their excellency, seemed not sufficient to satisfy the ear of the world thereunto accustomed." He takes up Campion's statement

<sup>1</sup> *A Defence of Ryme, Ancient Critical Essays*, ii, p. 197.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 197-98.



"ill customes are to be left," and asks how that can "be taken for an ill custome, which Nature has thus ratified, all nations receiued, [and] time so long confirmed;" and then turns his attack against the new verse.

Nor will the general sort, for whom we write . . . taste these labored measures but as an orderly prose when we haue all done. For this kind of acquaintance and continuall familiarity euer had betwixt our eare and this cadence, is grown to so intimate a friendship, as it will hardly ever be brought to misse it.

Suffer then the world to inioy that which it knowes, and what it likes : seeing whatsoever forme of wordes doth moove delight and sway the affections of men, in what Scythian sort so euer it be disposed and vttered, that is true number, measure, eloquence and perfection of speech.<sup>1</sup>

"What," asks he, "is to be gained by the innovation?"

Idle wits will write, in that kinde as do now in this : imitation will after, though it breake her necke. . . . As good still to use Ryme and a little reason as neither Ryme nor reason. . . . Seeing it is matter that satisfies the iudicial, appeare in what habite it will, all these pretended proportions of words, howsoever placed, can be but words, and peradventure serue but to embroile our vnderstanding, whilst seeking to please our eare. . . . But such affliction doth laborsome curiosity still lay upon our best delights . . . as if art were ordained to afflict Nature, and that we could not go but in fetters, . . . as if it were not to fashion but to confound the vnderstanding.<sup>2</sup>

Having thus directly answered his opponent, Daniel proceeds to show that rime, far from limiting invention, "in an eminent spirit whom Nature hath fitted for that mystery . . . rather gives him wings to mount . . . as it were beyond his power to a far happier flight." He commends the sonnet and other stanza-forms for their very limitations, saying : "All excellencies being sold to us at the harde price of labor, it follows, where we bestow most thereof, we buy the best success : . . . for the body of our imagination being as an unformed chaos, without fashion, without day, if by the divine power of the spirit it be wrought into an orbe of order and forme, is it not the more pleasing to nature, that desires a certainty, and comports not with that which is

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 201-2.



infinit to haue these clozes, rather than not to know where to end?" The author objects that we should "so soon yield our consents captiue to the authoritie of antiquitie, as our own understandings are not built upon the squares of Greece and Italy." <sup>1</sup>

We are the children of nature as well as they, we are not placed out of the way of iudgment, but that the same sun of discretion shineth upon vs. . . . It is not the observing of Trochaicques nor their Iambicques, that will make our writings ought the wiser: all their poesie, all their philosophie is nothing, vnless we bring the discerning light of conceipt with vs to apply it to vse. It is not books but only that great booke of the world, and the all ouerspreading grace of Heaven that makes men truly iudicial. Nor can it but touch of arrogant ignorance, to hold this or that nation barbarous, these or those times grosse, considering how this manifold creature man, wheresoever he stand in the world, hath always some disposition of worth . . . and is eminent in some one thing or other, that fits the humor and the times.<sup>2</sup>

He argues the narrowness of the Greeks in considering all nations barbarous save themselves; and appeals to the laws and customs of the Goths and Vandals, the original of most of the provincial constitutions of Christendom, as serving to clear them from this imputation of utter ignorance. He declares that learning and culture may exist in a nation that has never heard of anapests or tribrachs, and cites Petrarch with his *Africa*, his *Punic War* and his Latin *Epistles*, "all which notwithstanding wrought him not that glory and fame . . . as did his poems in Italian;" whilst Tolomei's experiment at classic innovation "[died] in the attempt and was buried as soon as it was borne."<sup>3</sup>

Then follows a brief review of the revival of learning in Italy, the first teaching of Greek in the West by Chrysolaras and others, and the invention of printing, all cited for the purpose of answering Campion's somewhat narrow designation of Erasmus and Sir Thomas More as the chief originators of the New Learning. Our champion of rime never loses a chance, and upon the mention of Sir Thomas More adds: "the last great ornament to this land, and a Rymer."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 204.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.



Daniel then turns to early England, and denies that she had formerly been "behind in her portion of spirit and worthiness," declaring her to have been "concurrent with the best of all the lettered world." And he names the Venerable Bede, Josephus Devonus, Walter Map, Nigell, Bracton, Bacon and Occam, adding: "It is but the cloudes gathered about our own iudgment that makes us think all other ages wrapt vp in mistes: and the great distance betwixt vs, that causes vs to imagine men so farre off to be so little in respect of ourselues." He warns us against the danger of generalizing upon insufficient data, and affirms that "the distribution of giftes is universal and all seasons hath them in some sort."<sup>1</sup>

Eloquence and gaye words are not of the substance of wit, it is but the garnish of a nice time, the ornaments that doe but decke the house of a state. . . . Hunger is as well satisfied with meat served in pewter as Siluer. Discretion is the best measure, the rightest foote in what pace soever it runne. . . . There is but one learning, which *omnes gentes habent scriptum in cordibus suis*, one and the self same spirit that worketh in all. We have but one body of iustice, one body of wisdom throughout the whole world, which is but apparelled according to the fashion of every nation.<sup>2</sup>

The author now broadens his argument to notice "the wonderfull architecture of this state of England," and prove therefrom the judgment and abilities of the minds that wrought it, arraigning "Innovation" as "a viper . . borne with reproach in her mouth," that seeks ever "to winne reputation of wit, and yet . . is never so wise as it would seeme," and urging that we tend toward perfection "in the course wee are in." After some severe strictures upon "the great scholars," whose "high knowledges do but give them more eyes to look out into uncertaintie and confusion," and the ill success of whose "longings" causes them, with Xerxes, "to whippe the sea and send a cartell of defiance to Mount Athos,"<sup>3</sup> the critic turns to the consideration of Campion's concrete propositions and makes sad havoc among them.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208.



We must here imitate the Greeks and Latines and yet we are heere shewed to disobey them, euen in their own numbers and quantities: taught to produce what they make shorte, and make shorte what they produce: made beleue to be shewd measures in that forme wee have not seene, and no such matter: tolde that here is the perfect arte of versifying, which in conclusion is yet confessed to be vnperfect, as if our aduersary, to be opposite to vs, were become vnfaithful to himself, and seeking to leade us out of the way of reputation, hath aduentured to intricate and confound him in his own courses, running vpon most uneuen grounds, with imperfect rules, weake proofes and vnlawful laws. Whereunto the world, I am persuaded, is not so vnreasonable as to subscribe, considering the vniust authoritie of the law-giver. . . . .

As though there were that disobedience in our wordes, as they would not be ruled, or stand in order without so many intricate lawes, which would argue a great perversenes amongst them, according to that, *in pessima republica plurimæ leges*. . . And now in what case were this poore state of words, if in like sort, another tyrant the next year should arise and abrogate these lawes, and ordaine others clean contrary, according to his humor? . . . . .

What a do haue we here, what strange precepts of art about the framing of Iambique verse in our language, which, when all is done, reaches not by a foote, but falleth out to be the plaine ancient verse, consisting of ten sillables or five feet, which has ever been vsed among vs time out of minde? And for all this cunning and counterfeit name, neither can or will bee any other in nature than it hath bin euer heretofore. . . Then follows the English Trochaicke . . hauing here no other grace, than that in sound it runs like the known measure of our former ancient verse ending . . in a feminine foote, sauing it is shorter by one sillable at the beginning. . . Next comes the Elegiack . and that likewise is no other than our accustomed measure of five feet: if there be any difference, it must be made in the reading, and therein we must stand bound to stay, where often we would not, and sometimes either breake the accent, or the due course of the word. And . . for the other foure kindes of numbers, . they are . . such as have ever been familiarly used amongst us. So that of all these eight severall kindes of new promised numbers, you see what we have, only what was our own before, and the same apparelled in forraine titles. . . . See the power of nature, it is not all the artificiall coverings of wit that can hide their native and original condition, which breakes out thorowe the strongest bandes of affectation, and will bee it selfe do singularitie what it can.<sup>1</sup>

In concluding, Daniel takes the occasion to make a few remarks upon matters of versification, wherein, it is his opinion,

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211-213.



that reformation is needful. He finds "those continuall cadences of couplets vsed in long and continued poems . . . very tiresome and vnpleasing . . . by reason . . . of a kind of certaintie which stuffs the delight rather than entertaines it."<sup>1</sup> In this, as we have seen, Daniel follows, with no little reason, the conservative view of the earlier writers in their objection to "riding rime;" an objection, however, by no means shared by his great contemporary, Jonson, who told Drummond that it was his intention to write "ane Epick Poeme intituled *Heroologia*" in this much-condemned metre, "for he detesteth all other rimes."<sup>2</sup> Daniel confesses that his "aduersary, Campion, hath wrought this much" upon him: "that I think a tragedy would indeed best comport with a blank verse."<sup>3</sup> Strange that Shakespeare and all his compeers could not have "wrought this much" upon "the laureate!" In a consideration of rime, however, Daniel adds that alternate or cross rime still holds the best place in his affection, and that he does not like the intermixture of masculine and feminine rimes, holding the latter "fittest for ditties." After incidentally, but ingenuously, alluding to certain of his own poems in illustration, he makes these observations on the general characteristics of poets:

The greatest hinderer of our [*i. e.*, the poets] proceeding and the reformation of our errors, is this selfe-love, whereunto we Versifiers are euer noted to be especially subiect; a disease of all other the most dangerous, and incurable, being once seated in the spirits, for which there is no cure, but only by a spirituall remedy. . . . For there is not the simplest writer that will ever tell himself he doth ill, but as if he were the parasite onely in sooth to his own doings, perswades him that his lines cannot but please others, which so much delight himselfe. . . .

Next to this deformitie stands our affectation, wherein we alwayes bewray our selues to be both vnkind and vnnaturall to our natiue language, in disguising and forging strange or vnusual wordes as if it were to make our verse seem another kind of speech out of the course of our vsual practice, displacing our wordes, or inuesting new, openly vpon a singularitie: when

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30. In opposition to these views, note Nashe's earlier objections to the "swelling bombast of a bragging blank verse," Preface to Greene's *Menaphon*, Works of Greene, Ed. Grosart, vi, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Notes of Ben Jonson's Conversations with Drummond*. Sh. Soc. Pub., 1842, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> *A Defence of Ryme, Ancient Critical Essays*, p. 31.



our own accustomed phrase, set in due place, would expresse us more familiarly and to better delight.<sup>1</sup>

We are not surprised to learn that there was never a second edition of Campion's *Observations*. Daniel's well-considered and vivacious article met the classicist on his own ground and completely refuted him. It must be confessed that a careful reading of Daniel's *Defence of Ryme* will leave a better impression of the real weight of that able and thoughtful author than too continued a perusal of much of his "chaste and correct" poetry.

In 1619, seventeen years after the publication of the first edition of Daniel's pamphlet, Ben Jonson told Drummond that "he had written a discourse of Poesie both against Campion and Daniel, especially this last, wher he [Jonson] proves couplets to be the bravest sort of verses, especially when they are broken, like Hexameters: and that cross rimes and stanzaes (becaus the purpose would lead him beyond eight lines to conclude) were all forced."<sup>2</sup> This interesting *Discourse* has unfortunately perished, probably in the burning of Jonson's library; although some of the matter therein contained doubtless remains to us in the author's *Timber or Discoveries*, the bulk of which is supposed to have been written toward the close of the author's life. It would perhaps be a fitting conclusion to this paper to epitomize the critical opinions upon our topic of England's first great literary dictator, Ben Jonson; but as his life was greatly prolonged, and these opinions did not see the light until after his death, well nigh on the verge of Commonwealth times; and as many of them were formed not alone upon the simpler basis of Elizabethan times, but upon the less pure and more florid products of the Jacobean and Caroline poets, we must defer a consideration of this interesting topic until some more fitting occasion.

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 218-19.

<sup>2</sup> *Notes of Ben Jonson's Conversations with Drummond*. Sh. Soc. Pub., 1842, p. 2.



## VII.

We have thus seen that not many years after what has been called the revival of poetry, in the later days of Henry VIII, an interest was awakened among the learned as to what was likely to be the future of English poetry. That the subject was regarded as problematical is shown by the prevailing dissatisfaction with the achievements of English poets ; whether the old national school, of which Skelton was the type, the decaying Chaucerians, or the new school, as yet not fully tried, of which Wyatt and Surrey were the chief exponents—against all a dislike for the jangle of rime formed no small factor in this disaffection. With the growing sense of nationality came a desire to surpass in the arts ; and the scholar, trained to accept the authority of the ancients, under the influence of the new learning, sought for his models among the Greeks and Romans. The theory was simple enough ; but, though rude and conflicting, there was such a thing as an existing English prosody, although its rules had not been formulated. Ascham recognized the real difficulty, even in recommending the classic remedy. But the zeal of the young Areopagites would see no difficulty, and under the advice of their learned mentors, Harvey and Drant, sought the complete subjugation of the English language to the artificial laws of Greek and Latin prosody. Notwithstanding the undoubted fact that “all good English metre comes out scatheless from the application” of the “strictest rules of classical prosody,” when we remember that there is a vast difference between the application of such rules to existing English metres, and the application of English verse to the length and breadth of classical prosody, we may reaffirm that it was not in the nature of things that such an attempt as that of the Areopagus should succeed. However, “it certainly did the young Areopagites no harm to try ;” and the good sense and taste of Spenser soon convinced him that if fame was to be won, it was to be won in the national versification and in no borrowed, classical plumes. Spenser’s apostasy was the death-blow of “the artificial versifying,” and the success of his poetry wrought more than many



books of controversy in vindicating the native principles. Yet such had been the authority of the Areopagus, and the interest excited by its attempts, that throughout the whole period experiments in the classic metres continued a favorite diversion among many of the lesser poets. We have seen Webbe, under conflicting influences, placing Spenser on a par with Theocritus and Virgil, and then "travestying *The Shepherd's Calendar* into sapphics," and giving an equal degree of praise to Gabriel Harvey for his abortive classical attempts; while Puttenham, with far sounder views, none the less gives some space to the subject of these "scholasticall toyes." Many years after Campion returns to the subject in the modified form in which Ascham advanced it, and, with an unacquaintance with the great work of his age simply miraculous, makes a theoretical discovery of dramatic blank verse some fifteen years after *Tamburlaine*, to say nothing of anything earlier. But Campion's attempt was short-lived, and it needed not the learning and ability of Daniel to refute a theory, refuted in all the greatest works of the greatest era of modern letters.

Had the interest of Elizabethans in poetics stopped here, the whole subject would be little more than a matter of curiosity. But, side by side with the Areopagus and its experiments, were men—often, indeed, the same men—trying to formulate the rules of the existing English prosody, men who venerated the name of Chaucer, "the king of English poets," and acknowledged, as did Sidney, despite his hexameters and asclepiads: "certainly I must confesse my own barbarousnes, I neuer heard the olde song of Percy and Duglas, that I found not my heart mooued more then with a Trumpet." First among these critics was George Gascoigne, a practical writer, little affected by the classical influences of the time, in theory and practice a conscious purist and defender of the mother tongue against the increasing foreign influences. Besides his formulation of many didactic rules, for which the reader must be referred to the foregoing pages, Gascoigne is chiefly to be remembered for his promulgation and consistent practice of the later Wordsworthian doctrine, that the language of poetry is identical with the language



of prose, and his recognition of one of the chief metrical principles governing the scansion of our earlier verse. Except for several rules of thumb, for the most part taken from Gascoigne, the treatise of King James offers little of value, save a discussion of the "section" (cæsura) which seems to mark the influence of the older English metre upon the author, the mention of several interesting and peculiarly Scotch stanzas, and some other matters, such as the explanation of tumbling verse.

In Webbe's *Discourse of English Poetrie* we have the first attempt at a wider discussion of the subject of Poetics. The book is interesting for its high estimate of "the new poet," whose metres are taken as almost alone sufficient in the enumeration of the kinds of verse, and whose influence, together with the older influence of Ascham, is paramount throughout. Webbe, while deeply impressed with the desirability of introducing the classic metres into English, and while still wide of the conception of poetry as a fine art, was none the less a painstaking inquirer, really desirous of furthering investigation into the existing state of English poetry. Puttenham, however, with a less defined idea of his subject, and with a far stronger desire to write entertainingly, has given us the most complete and elaborate Elizabethan treatise of its kind. He upholds the dignity and universality of poetry, and affirms, with entire confidence, the possibility of an art of English poetry, as complete and as perfect as that of either Greece or Rome. While drawing many of his illustrations, both historical and other, from the classic and foreign authors, he does not hesitate to give his judgment of the previous English poets, although in this, as we have seen above, greatly limited, as to his contemporaries, by his courtly vision. In Puttenham's second book we have an intelligent and systematic presentation of the subject of the art of versifying, in which not a few of the real principles underlying the subject are clearly set forth. If the chatty old critic does go off into a needlessly particular examination of the *carmina figurata*, anagram and other curiosities, we can pardon him for the humor and good sense which form the two pervading traits of this engaging book. Campion, too, in the midst of much confusion,



hits upon some principles of great value, such as the phenomena of pauses and the explanation of redundant syllables ; and Daniel in the utterance : "as Greeke and Latin verse consists of the number and quantitie of syllables, so doth the English verse of measure and accent," with his added recognition of quantity as a factor, but not the all-important factor of English versification, has certainly affirmed a principle the simple recognition of which by many a later critic would have spared us much needless controversy.

In all these verse critics we note certain traits of resemblance. All are discursive and didactic rather than scientific, preferring to argue upon preconceived notions rather than to seek data for verification. In all, the limits of the subject are ill-defined, much being left incomplete and not a little more incorporated really foreign to the actual subject in hand ; nearly all show a tendency to dogmatize in attributing to certain metres and stanzas certain fixed uses ; and yet it is probable that it might be shown that among these writers the majority of the major principles of English versification are more or less fully recognizable.

On the broader ground of the consideration of poetry, it is not a little surprizing to note, in many of these works, a certain air of apology for taking time and pains to treat of so paltry a subject as that of poetry ; a tendency to look upon poetry—as did Webbe and Harington—as a sort of bittersweet, in which the somewhat distasteful, if wholesome, moral is to be judiciously wrapped and concealed in its sugar coating. Puttenham laughs slyly at these people when he calls them "reprehendours . . . all holy and mortified to the world, . . . esteeming nothing that sauoreth not of theology," and Sidney and Spenser rise to a loftier and grander answer in their conception of poetry as one of the fine arts, a divine gift of heaven. As might be supposed, then as now, the definitions of poetry are legion and as various. Webbe declares that poetry must delight the hearer "as well by the apt and decent framing of wordes . . . as by the skilful handling of the matter ;" and Campion insists upon the "sweet numbers" as well as the "high and lofty conceite."



In this Puttenham also concurs, calling "the art of poesie," "a skill appertaining to utterance," and again, "a pleasant maner of utterance varying from the ordinarie of purpose to refresh the mynde by the eares delight," but affirming, none the less, the dignity and divine origin of the art. Harington insists upon the existence of a certain mystery or "concealment in verse," whereby things are rendered less familiar and, we may presume, therefore more artistic; and we find Gascoigne, a somewhat material purist, pleading long before against "poetic diction" for old English words as opposed to those that "smell of the inkhorn." Finally, we have Mr. Saintsbury's "pestilent heresy of prose-poetry" represented by no less a man than Sidney, who denies that the accident of metre has anything to do with the essential nature of poetry; while Spenser, with the ideality which we might expect of the poet's poet, is made to declare that poetry is "no art, but a divine gift, and heauenly instinct not to bee gotten by labour and learning but adorned with both."

In the less purely technical of this series of tracts, the whole subject hovers about the justification of poetry as an art; as Mr. Arber puts it, the question at issue was "whether uncleanness, falsity, and effeminacy were separable or inseparable from poetry." On this issue Gosson and Lodge locked arms, although the application of their consideration was extended to embrace the kindred arts of music and the drama. In this controversy Gosson was guilty of the familiar Puritan mistake of involving the good and the bad alike in his anathemas, and mistaking the abuse of a thing too often for the thing itself; and Lodge's answer, while in many respects just and adequate, is heavy with the ponderous weight of accumulated learning. Men had not yet learned to reason in these matters on the merits of the question, but sought to gain ground by the brute force of an invulnerable phalanx of learned authority. Of Sidney and the extreme conservatism of many of his views, enough has already been said. However opinion may differ as to the tenets of *An Apologie for Poetrie*, its enthusiastic style, and its strong personality, it must remain the loftiest piece of intellectual criticism of its day, the first attempt at that species of broad, æsthetic criticism



which, in the hands of a Lessing, awakened the literature of a kindred people from the lethargy of despair. The effect of Sidney's *Apologie* on the theories of his time must have been unusually strong; such was that brilliant personality, such was the enthusiasm of his strongly ideal but keenly intellectual nature, that, after the publication of the *Apologie*, the merely didactic rules and critical platitudes of the earlier writers became impossible. If King James, Harvey, and Puttenham represent the pedantry, the scholarly and curious learning of the age, if Gosson, Lodge and Daniel represent its love of controversy and its power therein, if we must look to Gascoigne for much of its plain common sense, to Campion for its theorizing, and to Webbe for its honest, if somewhat heavy endeavor, it is to Sidney that we must turn for its enthusiasm and for that broader sympathy which has founded modern criticism. It was this broad sympathy of Sidney's nature that made him by turn a Euphuist, an Areopagite, a reprover of Euphuism, and a successful poet in the national verse; and it is this sympathy, with his culture and his enthusiasm, that makes him the highest exponent of the best criticism of his day.















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